

Rose Foster

The Mysteries of the Court
of London



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THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON

CHAPTER I

MRS. PIGGLEBERRY AND HER LODGERS

IT was nine o'clock in the evening of the day following the incidents just related; and Tim Meagles was seated in the parlour at his lodgings, discussing rum punch, and conversing with the Amazon, who occupied a chair near him. Indeed, Mr. Meagles was placed on one side of the hearth, and his fair friend on the other; and while he drank the steaming liquor from a tumbler, she sipped her allowance from a wine-glass. We must also observe that the gentleman was smoking a full-flavoured Havana; and the lady was indulging in a Spanish cigarette, the tobacco of which it was formed being of so mild a flavour that there was no danger of its marring the fragrance of her breath or dimming the dazzling brilliancy of her fine teeth.

The fire burned cheerfully in the grate, the lamp diffused a rich mellow light through the apartment, the thick curtains were closed, the atmosphere was warm, and everything was comfortable, although the air was piercing cold without and the snow was falling in thick flakes.

"Well, Joe Warren and his friends seem to have got themselves into a precious scrape at last, Letitia," observed Meagles, throwing himself back in his chair and watching the blue wreaths of thin smoke that curled upward from his cigar. "Committed for trial yesterday, sent to Newgate —"

"And Warren is placed in a cell by himself as a very desperate character," interrupted the Amazon.

"Yes, and this morning's paper also says that he is heavily ironed," added Meagles. "Well, I am really sorry for him; he is a brave fellow, and faithful to those who employ him. At least, so I have heard. But as for the Big Beggarman, — the scoundrel who played you and me that scurvy trick at his vile den in Horslydown, — I am glad he is in for it."

"So am I," rejoined Lady Lade. "But only fancy that man Page having been so active in the process of giving the party up to justice; for I suppose it is the same who sold us the missing half of the certificate the other day?"

"The very same," answered Meagles. "When he called and proposed to sell it, he told me that he wished to conclude the bargain at once, as he wanted to be off to Aylesbury on very particular business; and he mentioned the name of Sir Richard Stamford at the time."

"Then Mr. Page is assuredly a very shrewd fellow," observed the Amazon. "He received a thousand guineas from us, for the half of the document; and now he is feathering his nest by means of the services he is rendering the baronet."

"No doubt of it. But what an extraordinary history is Sir Richard Stamford's," continued Meagles. "A few weeks ago the whole country was ringing with the awful crimes he had committed, — murder, fraud, forgery, arson, and Heaven knows what; and now, all of a sudden, he makes his innocence as apparent as the sun at noonday. Indeed, the evidence which was given yesterday at Bow Street was overwhelming against Martin and Ramsey as the real forgers, and also as having put a quantity of spurious coin into circulation. Then the kidnapping of Sir Richard and Mr. Page was equally well proven against Warren and the Big Beggarman; and a fellow called Briggs was shown to have played the part of gaoler at the house in Thacker's Court."

"If that were all that was brought forward against Warren, — I mean the kidnapping business, — he would get off with transportation or imprisonment," said the Amazon; "but up jumps the indefatigable and universal Mr. Page to prove a highway robbery against him."

"A highway robbery, committed in a lane leading out of the Edgeware Road," observed Meagles, laughingly.

"Well, the law makes a lane a highway for its own special purposes, you great booby," returned the Amazon.

"So I am afraid poor Warren will find to his cost," answered Meagles. "The whole gang of them will be tried this week, or the beginning of next. I shall certainly go to the Old Bailey and hear the proceedings."

At this moment, a low and timid knock was heard at the door; and Meagles, as if to inspire the individual with courage, shouted out, "Come in!" at the very top of his voice.

The door opened slowly, and an elderly woman, dressed in black, and having a respectable appearance, entered the room.

"Well, Mrs. Piggleberry, what news?" inquired Meagles, as he caught a glimpse of his landlady's countenance, which was broad, ruddy, and good-tempered in expression.

"Nothink partickler, sir," she answered, in a mincing tone and with a low curtsy. "Leastways it's of no very great importance; only Mr. Brogden, which lives on the second floor front, would be much obleeged if you'd be so kind as to have the goodness to take the trouble to tell Master Wasp to give him his wig, because he's afeard of catching cold if he stays much longer without it."

"His wig! Mr. Brogden's wig!" exclaimed Meagles, laughing heartily, his mirth being echoed by that of Lady Letitia Lade.

"Well, it is funny, sir," said Mrs. Piggleberry, thinking it right to laugh also. "But Master Wasp is a dear delightful boy, and full of sperrets, to be sure. Only if he would be so condescending as to give Mr. Brogden back his wig, I should feel so much obleeged."

"But how came Wasp with the wig at all?" demanded Meagles.

"Why, my dear good sir," responded Mrs. Piggleberry, approaching the table in a deferential manner, "as Mr. Brogden was a-going up-stairs to his room this evening about six o'clock, that sweet playful creetur', Master Wasp, let down a long bit of string over the banisters on the second floor; and as the string happened to have a fish-hook at the end, it verry natarally come in contact with Mr. Brog-

den's vig. Well, I s'pose, Master Wasp give a pull, and away went the vig, and Mr. Brogden went up after it — but, behold ye! Master Wasp was indiskiverable. So Mr. Brogden rushes into his room and rings the bell with a violence that makes me think the house was a-fire; and I runs up to see where it was a-blazin'. But there wasn't no fire, only Mr. Brogden's vig a-missin', and he, poor gentleman! obleeged to put on his cotton nightcap. So I begged him not to kick up a rumpus, as I know'd Mr. Lade, sir, was with you, and I wouldn't have you disturbed on no account whatsoever. But as Master Wasp only laughs in his sweet playful way when I ask him about the vig, and as Mr. Brogden says he'll come down and speak to you, sir, I thought it best just to step in and tell, leastways, to hint, that perhaps Master Wasp won't mind givin' up the vig if so be you would have the goodness to be so kind as to take the trouble to ask him."

"Order Wasp to come up to me directly, Mrs. Piggleberry," exclaimed Meagles, who, as well as the Amazon, had been convulsed with laughter during the whole time the landlady was explaining her second-floor lodger's misadventure.

"Now pray don't scold the dear boy, sir!" said the worthy woman, in a beseeching tone. "He's such a nice youth, so amiable and all that —"

"Well, go down, then, Mrs. Piggleberry," interrupted Meagles, "and tell him that he must take up Mr. Brogden's wig at once, with a handsome apology. But wait a moment, my good creature," added Tim, a thought striking him. "Who's that sanctified-looking gentleman that has taken your third floor?"

"Lord bless ye, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Piggleberry, clasping her hands and turning up the whites of her eyes, "that's a wery pious man, and I do raly think his presence will bring a blessin' upon my house. He come down into the kitchen this mornin', sir, and said so many good things to me and Jemimy — that's the servint-gal, you know, sir — that we both whimpered for an hour; and he gave us some religious tracks, as he calls 'em, sir, and told us to perooze 'em with attention, and they'd be the salvation of us."

"And pray who is this pious gentleman, Mrs. Piggleberry?" asked Meagles, exchanging a sly smile with the

Amazon, who was greatly amused by the landlady's description of her new lodger.

"Well, sir, I can't say I exactly understand what he is," was the response; "but he told me when he took the vacant floor that he was a New Light. Perhaps you know what that means, sir?" added Mrs. Piggleberry, in a submissive and deferential tone.

"May I be hanged if I do!" exclaimed Meagles. "But what is his name?"

"The Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby, sir," answered the widow.

"Ah! then he belongs to some religious sect called New Lights," said Lady Letitia Lade, with a merry laugh. "But what on earth could have induced him to take a lodging in one of the most fashionable quarters of the West End?"

"Well, sir," answered Mrs. Piggleberry, addressing herself to the Amazon, whom, be it remembered, she invariably called Mr. Lade, — for the good widow was too discreet to suffer it to appear that she recognized the sex of her best lodger's constant companion, — "Well, sir, I raly can't satisfy you on that pint. But I know that the reverend gentleman has plenty of money, for he paid me a quarter in advance, and it seems he possesses a good friend in one Salem; because he says, says he, as he counted down the guineas, 'It's all through that blessed Salem I'm able to set up my staff in your taybernacle, my Christian sister.' So you see, sir, he calls my house a taybernacle, for which I'm very much obleeged to him; for I know it's a holy word and carries a blessin' along with it. Ah! Mr. Sneaksby is a very good man, a very pious gentleman," continued the widow, shaking her head solemnly. "This afternoon a fine carriage stops at the door, and a great tall handsome livery-servant helps out two fat old ladies, so magnificently dressed; and Mr. Sneaksby comes down into the hall to receive them, and he gives 'em each a buss on both cheeks, which he called 'the kiss of peace.' Then he leads them up-stairs, and the bell rings. I answer it myself, because just at that moment Jemimy was a-polishin' the fenders and cleaning the sarse-pans, and was as black as a tinker and not fit to be seen. So Mr. Sneaksby orders me to get two bottles of wine and some nice sweet biscuits; and one of the ladies gives me a guinea to pay for 'em. Well, when I went up again with

the wine and the cakes, the reverend gentleman and the two ladies was all three a-cryin' bitterly, and beatin' their buzzims, and calling themselves 'miserable sinners,' and 'unsavoury wessels,' and 'fleshpots of Egypt,' and a lot of hard names which I don't recollect now. It quite made me whimper myself to see such good people blackguarding their own selves in such a outrageous fashion; and thinkin' that the sooner they got into better sperrets the more they'd be pleased, I draw'd the corks and poured out the wine. But when I handed it to the fust lady, she groaned awful, shook her head, and exclaimed, 'I ain't worthy of it!' Then I went to t'other lady; and she groaned more awfuller still, and said the same thing. But Mr. Sneaksby says, says he, 'Yes, my Christian sisters; you may take it for your stomach's sake, as Timothy did.' And so I suppose the poor dear ladies was troubled with the colic; and they drank off the wine without no more hesitation. I then left 'em; and they returned to their dewotions — "

"How do you know that, Mrs. Piggleberry?" inquired Meagles.

"Why, sir," answered the widow, blushing and growing embarrassed, "to tell the truth, I listened at the door for a little bit, for I was afeard the ladies would do themselves a mischief through beatin' their buzzims so unmerciful."

"And did they exchange any more kisses of peace?" asked Lady Letitia, perfectly enjoying Mrs. Piggleberry's description.

"Yes, a many, sir," responded the good woman, ingenuously. "The ladies remained with Mr. Sneaksby for an hour; and then they went away in their carriage. But they was so overcome with their feelin's that they could scarcely walk straight, and they was evidently staggerin' under the weight of wery painful emotions."

"Did they finish the two bottles of wine?" demanded Meagles, exchanging a sly look with the Amazon.

"Oh, yes, sir, every drop," answered Mrs. Piggleberry.

"Ah! then we can pretty well guess what sort of emotions they were staggering under," observed Meagles, dryly.

The landlady affected not to catch this remark; for it was a principle, or rather, a prudential reservation, with her, never to observe or seem to hear anything that tended to

the disparagement of those lodgers who paid her well and allowed her free access to their cupboards and trunks.

"Now, then, my good woman," said Meagles, "you can go and settle that little business between Mr. Brogden and my young scamp of a page, Wasp."

"Thank'ee kindly, sir, for the trouble you've taken in the little trifling matter," returned Mrs. Pigglesberry, who had not, however, much to be grateful for, seeing that Mr. Meagles had not even stirred from his seat to procure the restoration of Mr. Brogden's peruke.

The landlady curtseyed and left the room; and the moment the door closed behind her, Tim Meagles and Lady Letitia Lade burst each into a violent fit of laughter.

"Well, upon my honour," exclaimed the former, as soon as his mirth had so far subsided as to allow him to give utterance to his thoughts, "this is the finest fun I ever heard in all my life. The new lodger is evidently some sanctified scoundrel whom amorous old dowagers run after. We must invite him to pass an evening with us, my beauty."

"Capital!" cried the Amazon, who had laughed till the tears ran down her flushed cheeks, where they resembled pearls upon rose-leaves. "But I must leave you now, Tim," she added, after a brief pause. "Sir John made me promise that I would return to sup with him; and as he so generously gave me the money we required to buy up the Marquis de Bellois's papers and the half of the document from Mr. Page, I must humour him a trifle."

"Very good," observed Meagles. "I suppose it is little the old fellow requires of you besides your company occasionally?"

"You naughty, good-for-nothing fellow, Tim!" exclaimed the beautiful huntress, bestowing upon his cheek a slight smack, rather resembling a caress, with her pretty hand. "I shall not answer such questions, sir. Good night."

"Good night, my beauty," responded Meagles, pressing his lips to the Amazon's moist mouth. "You will come and see me to-morrow; and perhaps I shall have some funny things to tell you with regard to the new lodger."

"Oh, we must amuse ourselves at his expense," exclaimed the huntress; and having drawn on her gloves, fixed the becoming hat upon her head, and, taking up her riding-whip, she quitted the house.

Not many minutes had elapsed after her departure, when the mischievous page, whom Mrs. Piggleberry denominated Master Wasp, entered the room, bearing a letter which had just arrived.

We have already described this precocious youth as being slim, genteel, and good-looking; we may now add that his countenance was intellectual and pleasing, his eyes large, black, and sparkling, and his teeth excellent. But there was a little lurking devil of good-tempered mischief in the expression of those eyes; and, notwithstanding the demure aspect which he put on in the presence of his master, it was easy to perceive that he was naturally full of fun and frolic. In her heart Mrs. Piggleberry detested him; she was, however, too good a judge to offend an individual who might prejudice Mr. Meagles against her, and who was, moreover, well acquainted with the little pilferings which she practised in reference to that gentleman's larder.

"Well, you young rascal," exclaimed Meagles, in a tone which he vainly endeavoured to render severe, "what the deuce have you been doing with Mr. Brogden's wig?"

"Me, sir!" ejaculated the page, affecting the most startled amazement. "I can assure you, sir, that Mr. Brogden has got his wig on his head at this very moment."

"Yes, because you have given it back to him," replied Meagles. "Come, let us have no more of this nonsense in future, Wasp, or else Mrs. Piggleberry will give me notice to quit."

"Not she, indeed, sir!" cried the boy. "Why, you are house-rent, washing, taxes, breakfast, dinner, and supper to her, — ay, and clothes to all her poor relations into the bargain. She won't get rid of you, sir, in a hurry."

"Well, well, I dare say it is so," murmured Meagles, hastily. "Come, give me that letter; and tell Mrs. Piggleberry to get me a broiled fowl for my supper."

"Yes, sir," answered Wasp; and away he went to execute the order he had just received.

"Who the deuce can this be from?" exclaimed Meagles, aloud, as he turned the letter over and over. "Black-edged paper, a beautiful female hand, a small seal, with mourning wax — Egad! it must be from the poor orphan, Rose Foster!"

Then, hastily breaking it open, his eyes glanced over the contents, which ran as follows:

"The generous interest which you have shown in my unhappy lot, and the kind assistance and counsel which you have given me in my otherwise friendless condition, would indeed experience but an ungrateful return were I not to make you acquainted with the resolution to which I have come, after very mature consideration. You may perhaps think that it is improper, and even indelicate on my part, to have given way to reflections of a worldly nature so soon, so very soon after the cruel and terrible bereavement which I have experienced. But it is precisely because the sense of this bereavement is intolerable in the long and unemployed hours I pass by myself, that I have determined to seek an occupation which may to some extent relieve my mind from incessant meditation on the loss of my beloved and lamented parents. Besides, I feel that, situated as I am, it is a sin to remain idle, and that every day which is passed by me in inactivity and in brooding over my misfortunes, is the wilful abandonment of an irretrievable portion of my youth to an unavailing despair. Employment, I feel, will tutor my soul to resignation; and although I can never cease to think of my lost parents, and must often, often drop tears to their memory, yet I am well assured that constant occupation will mellow down my grief to a sentiment of placid submission to the divine will.

"Under all these circumstances, I feel convinced that you will approve of the resolution I have adopted, and the step I have taken. Before you receive this letter, I shall have entered a large and most respectable millinery establishment, the mistress of which carries the excellence of her heart and the kindness of her soul in her frank, honest, and open countenance. I shall therefore be enabled to earn my bread, without making any further inroads upon the sum which remained from the amount paid by the prince and after the settlement of Messrs. Hodson and Morley's claim. That sum will therefore remain to accumulate in the Bank of England, where, under your counsel, I deposited it.

"In the establishment where I shall be when you receive this note, I have entered under an assumed name. I do not

wish the mention of that of Foster to provoke curiosity and lead to questions concerning the lamentable death of my beloved parents. I am convinced that you will approve of my resolution in this respect.

"But now I am about to write something which may appear ungrateful: I, however, beseech you to view it altogether in another light. Fearful that you may think the step I have taken to be premature and that the avocation I have chosen is derogatory to a young lady well and tenderly brought up, and apprehending that, under these impressions, you may seek to wean me from my purpose, I dare not for the present inform you where that establishment which I am about to enter is situated. But when my mind has become more settled, and I have given this new mode of life a fair trial, I will then write to you again and ask you to call and see me. For I shall ever regard you as a friend whom God raised up to shield my father's memory from any blame which the result of a coroner's inquest would have attached to it, — as a friend, also, to counsel and assist myself. Accept, then, Mr. Meagles, my profound gratitude; and believe me when I declare that I shall ever entertain a deep sense of the obligations under which I exist toward you.

"ROSE FOSTER."

"She has acted wisely, prudently!" said Meagles to himself, when he had terminated the reading of this epistle. "The delicacy of her innocent mind has suggested to her that it would be improper for a friend of my sex to visit her in her new abode, and she is right. But God knows that I would sooner have cut my hand off than injure a hair of her sweet head! Ah! what, a tear trickling down my cheek! Well, be it so, and I am not ashamed of it! May your existence prove a happy one, sweet Rose; and perdition seize the villain who shall seek to do you harm!"

Having thus mused aloud, Tim Meagles hastily passed his hand across his eyes, and then drained the tumbler of reeking punch which stood near him; for he felt moved, affected, unmanned.

O man of the world that thou wast, rake and debauchee though thou mightest have been, yet thine heart was good; and the drops which then trickled down thy cheeks were

an atonement for many vices and many errors. Flowing like the spring from the hard and sterile rock in the desert, the tears of a man are the waters of hope gushing forth from even a rugged nature. Like the vinegar upon granite, they dissolve obduracy into the softness of holy and blessed feelings.

CHAPTER II

NEWGATE

THE clock of Saint Sepulchre's Church was striking eleven in the forenoon, when Mrs. Brace, accompanied by Harriet, alighted from a hackney-coach at the door of the prison of Newgate.

They entered the dark and gloomy vestibule, where the chains of notorious malefactors were suspended to the walls, — as if crime must have its relics and justice treasure up its memorials.

The turnkey on duty inquired the business of the lady and her attendant; and the milliner instantly placed a piece of paper in his hand. It was an order, signed by one of the City aldermen, "to admit Mrs. Brace and friends to view his Majesty's prison of Newgate."

"Now, then, Soper!" exclaimed the turnkey, at the top of his voice; and a short, stout, dirty-looking individual woke up from a nap which he was enjoying as he lay stretched at length upon a form. "Two ladies to see the gaol. Come, bustle about now, and be alive, will'ee? Why, I'm blowed if you've slept off last night's ale yet."

"Keep your observations to yourself, Mr. Pigman," growled Mr. Soper, as he with difficulty suppressed a yawn. "This way, ladies, if you'll be so kind."

And taking up a bunch of huge keys, he opened a large grated door leading into a dark passage. Mrs. Brace and Harriet followed him; and he conducted them into a low hall, paved with massive flagstones, and the roof of which was supported by thick square pillars. At the end of this hall, a door opened to a staircase leading up into the chapel; and this was the first feature of interest which was inspected by the visitresses.

High, narrow, and dark, the chapel of Newgate is indeed well suited for the place. Its sombre aspect, the dark wood of which the pulpit, galleries, and pews are made, and the absence of all sounds from without, combine to render it a place of awful gloom. In the times of which we are writing, and indeed until within the last few years, there was a large circular enclosure in the middle, where persons doomed to death were seated to hear the "condemned sermon." Nowadays a chair for the wretched culprit occupies that spot; and the authorities thus render the unhappy being painfully conspicuous and shockingly prominent. Oh, ours indeed are bloodthirsty, atrocious, and sanguinary laws! and they necessarily render all their administrators, agents, and myrmidons cruel and heartless likewise.

"There, ladies," said Mr. Soper, "you see the gallery where we puts the vimen; and that's the gallery for the men. They're separated, you see: cos vy — morals afore everything. In this here round pew," he continued, pointing to the enclosure which we have already noticed, "the gallows' birds sits. On them Sundays when there's a condemned sermon, the place is quite crowded with all your fine lords and ladies from the Vest End, and with the families of the City authorities. Lord bless ye, ma'am," he added, turning toward Mrs. Brace, "it's as good as a play to the fashionable folk; but I often thinks to myself, thinks I, 'What a precious cruel and heartless set the wealthy and the great of this country are, to be sure!'"

The milliner made no reply, but she doubtless thought that the man was not far wrong; otherwise she would perhaps have taken the trouble to express her dissent from his observation.

"Now we'll wisit the vimen's room," said Mr. Soper; and he accordingly led the way into the wing tenanted by the female prisoners.

The moment the door of that compartment was thrown open, the ears of Mrs. Brace and Harriet were saluted by licentious songs, obscene jests, and terrible imprecations; and they drew back, shuddering from head to foot.

"Lord, this is nothing, I can assure ye, ladies," exclaimed the man. Then, raising his voice to the highest pitch of its gruff intonation, he vociferated, "Now, then, you

vimen, hold your jaw, will'ee? or else I'll tell the guv'ner and stop your meat at dinner-time to-day."

The females held their peace for a short interval; but it was not through respect for Mr. Soper's command, nor in dread of his menace. Their curiosity was suddenly excited by the arrival of visitors.

And now what a revolting spectacle met the eyes of Mrs. Brace and the lady's-maid! In a large apartment, along one side of which the beds were arranged like shelves, three deep, and reminding one of the berths in a ship's cabin, a number of hideous-looking women were assembled. The air was hot and fetid; the beds were all in disorder, dirty, and miserable. Some of the females were evidently in a state bordering upon intoxication, even at that early hour in the forenoon; and their flushed countenances were rendered more disgusting by the tangled, matted, or dishevelled state of their hair, their torn, loose, negligent, and filthy apparel, their bold looks, and the air of savage ferocity and hardened sin which stamped their features.

Having indulged in a good long stare at the visitors, some of the most daring of these wretches surrounded Mrs. Brace and Harriet, demanding money; and the milliner, with a sickening sensation at the heart, hastened to distribute some small silver coins amongst them. They expressed their pleasure in characteristic terms of revolting coarseness; and Soper conducted Mrs. Brace and the maid into an adjoining ward.

"Them's the misdemeanor vimen that you've just seen," he observed, as he closed the huge door of the first apartment. "Now you're going to visit the female felons."

Again were the ears of the visitors saluted with libidinous songs, obscene jests, and horrid oaths as they entered the second ward; and again were those voices extinguished for a few minutes by the presence of the milliner and her abigail.

The occupants of this room were not so uniformly revolting as those in the former; and yet they were a worse class of criminals, so far as the shades of iniquity are defined. But the misdemeanants were chiefly drunken wretches who had committed savage assaults, brothel-keepers, the lowest description of prostitutes, and old charwomen and washerwomen who had been committed for illegally pawning;

whereas the female felons consisted of the dashing woman of the town who had perpetrated a robbery, the servant who had stolen in her master's dwelling-house, the young creature who had murdered her illegitimate child, the well-dressed shoplifter, the poor seamstress who had disposed of the materials given her to make up, the lady who had robbed her furnished lodgings, the starving mother who had thieved a loaf for her famishing children, the receiver of stolen goods, the female swindler, and the old bawd in whose house some iniquitous deed had been committed. For in Newgate, up to this very hour, no attempt at classification, beyond the mere division of the misdemeanants and the felons, has ever been made; and thus the novice in crime herds with those who have grown gray in iniquity.

Is not this infamous? Is it not shocking in the extreme? And then the Legislature affects to wonder that crime should be upon the increase! How can it be otherwise? What effort is made to reform the offender? What wholesome scheme is adopted to reclaim and restore him to society? None; none; and nine-tenths of the wretched beings who crowd the felons' gaols, the hulks, and the penal settlements, and who ascend the accursed scaffold, are not so much the victims of their own misdeeds as of that atrocious apathy and abominable neglect which are exhibited by those who have the power of reforming and ameliorating the condition of prison discipline. The poor and the ignorant in this wretched, enslaved country are made poor and kept ignorant by the rascally and detestable oligarchy; and when John Bull boasts of the freedom and excellence of his institutions, he is a prejudiced, bigoted, narrow-minded, and besotted fool. Oh, my heart bleeds when I think of the wrongs which the millions endure at the hands of the few; and there are times when I feel ashamed, degraded, and humiliated at having been born an Englishman, and wish to God that I was a citizen of America!

For at this moment true freedom exists only in the United States; and it is a loathsome mockery, a foul lie, and a burning shame to vaunt even the enjoyment of a shadow of liberty on behalf of the masses of England.

Again in the female felons' ward was Mrs. Brace's purse opened; and, having dispensed some money amongst society's poor outcasts there, she followed Soper, who led

the way to the quadrangle occupied by the males, Harriet keeping close behind her mistress.

In the misdemeanants' apartment, a sad spectacle of human demoralization and abasement met the eyes of the visitors. Old men, young men, and boys were wasting their time in gaming, singing flash songs, relating anecdotes of villainy or debauchery, exchanging ribald jests, wrestling, or sparring. The ward was in the utmost disorder, and filthy to a degree. The atmosphere was suffocating and fetid; the bedding was tossed about in all directions, and the table was strewed with pewter pots, broken pipes, and tobacco ashes. For, at the period of which we are writing, the prisoners were allowed to expend their money freely; and the turnkeys and ward-keepers reaped a rich harvest by supplying indulgences to those who had the coin wherewith to procure them.

In the felons' apartment the assemblage was as motley as that in the misdemeanants' ward. There, likewise, the mere boy who had commenced his novitiate in crime by thieving a handkerchief, was thrown into the society of the accomplished housebreaker; and the friendless orphan, who had pilfered a loaf, was placed within the contaminating influence of the desperate highwayman. The miserable urchin who had filched a piece of bacon from a cheesemonger's shop-board was classed with the ferocious resurrectionist or the daring burglar; and the young clerk who had embezzled a few shillings of his master's money and was sincerely, bitterly repentant, found himself compelled to associate with the swell-mobsmen, the coiner, the smasher, the incendiary, and the returned convict.

"Them's four of the gang which was committed the day before yesterday," whispered Soper to Mrs. Brace, as he pointed to two persons who sat together at a table, and two others who were in conversation at one of the windows.

The first pair thus indicated consisted of Martin and Ramsey. The once luxurious, proud, and respected bankers of Aylesbury were now as woebegone as fallen men could be. Their pale countenances, downcast looks, and subdued tone were strong indications of the awful sense which they entertained of their degraded condition and of the terrible doom which most probably awaited them; while their unbrushed clothes, soiled linen, and neglected toilet proved

how deficient were the conveniences and how slight were their inclinations to render themselves decent in that loathsome place.

From the persons of Martin and Ramsey the eyes of Mrs. Brace turned toward the other two individuals who had been pointed out to her, and who were conversing at the window. These were Briggs and the Beggarman; but scarcely had the milliner caught a glimpse of the latter, when a sudden vertigo seized upon her, and, staggering back, she would have fallen on the floor, had not the lady's-maid caught her in her arms.

"Halloa! here's a blowen a-faintin'!" cried half a dozen coarse voices; and several of the inmates of the room were rushing toward Mrs. Brace in the hope of being enabled to secure her purse or any trinkets which she might have about her, when the milliner, suddenly recovering her self-possession, hurried from the apartment.

Harriet was close to her heels, and Soper banged the door violently in the faces of the felons who were thus coming officiously forward with the ostensible purpose of rendering assistance.

"It was the close air of that room," murmured Mrs. Brace, leaning against the wall in the passage and drawing a long breath; while she inwardly congratulated herself on escaping the observation of the Big Beggarman during the few minutes she had remained in the felons' ward.

For it will be remembered that this individual was the Magsman's companion on that occasion when the milliner's house in Pall Mall was broken into during the night; and therefore Mrs. Brace and the Beggarman were no strangers to each other. We should likewise observe that as she was unacquainted with the fellow's real nomenclature as well as with his nickname, she had not gleaned from the newspapers the fact that the Magsman's associate in the burglary at her dwelling was one of the gang so recently arrested and now in Newgate.

"Yes, I des say it were the stink of the place that made your missus ill," observed Mr. Soper to Harriet. "It's quite enow to breed a plague, and I verry often wonder that it don't. The City authorities wouldn't care a cuss if it did. But, come along, ma'am," he added, turning toward Mrs. Brace; "you've quite rekivered now, and I'll show

you the condemned cells. It's in one of them that we've been obleeged to put the 'torious Joe Warren, — better knowed as the Magsman, — on account of his being sich a owdacious feller that it's quite a blessin' there's any walls strong enough at all to keep him close. This way, ma'am."

Thus speaking, the man conducted Mrs. Brace and Harriet into a corridor whence opened five cells. This was on the ground floor, and he explained that there was the same number of cells on each of the two floors above. Mrs. Brace knew this already, as indeed she was acquainted with the situation of every ward, passage, and staircase which she had just visited; for she had a complete plan of Newgate at that very moment about her person.

"Now, ma'am," said Mr. Soper, in a whisper, "you shall see that terrible fellow which you've no doubt heerd of, and whose name is in all the newspapers."

A cold shudder passed through the frame of the milliner, striking to her very heart's core, as this announcement met her ears; for she knew that she was about to appear in the presence of her husband. Not that she apprehended any recognition on his part. The Gallows' Widow had succeeded in conveying to him, through the agency of the Kinchin-Grand, an intimation of the probable visit of Mrs. Brace and its object; and that this had been done the milliner was well aware. But she trembled because she loathed the idea of acting as an accomplice, even in so covert a manner, in any scheme with which her brutal husband was connected. Unhesitatingly would this woman assist any one of her aristocratic patrons in the seduction, or even the rape, of a virgin victim; but her exquisite refinement was shocked at the thought of mixing herself up with a Magsman or a Gallows' Widow, even though the former was her own husband. Oh, how strange a thing is conscience, sometimes concealing itself in the heart's innermost recesses, and there remaining voiceless, at other times speaking loud and trumpet-tongued in the ear!

The heavy bolts were drawn back, the key turned with a crashing sound in the lock, and the door of the cell which was last in the row, and consequently at the extreme end of the corridor, swung heavily around upon its hinges.

The eyes of Mrs. Brace instantly met those of the Magsman; and, although he gave not the slightest sign of recog-

nition, she could nevertheless perceive that a grim smile of satisfaction swept rapidly over his countenance.

The cell in which the Magsman was confined resembled a massive sepulchre. It was nearly nine feet high, ten in length, and about six in breadth. The vaulted ceiling, the stone pavement, the window double-grated and high up, the tremendous thickness of the wall, as shown by the depth of the loophole in which that small window was set, the oaken door which a nail four inches long could not completely perforate, and the heavy irons which the Magsman wore, — all these appearances struck the milliner, as her glance rapidly embraced them, with the impossibility of any one, however strong and daring, effecting an escape from that living tomb.

Nevertheless, she resolved to accomplish the aim of her visit; and addressing herself to the prisoner as an excuse for advancing into the cell, she said, "I hope you will repent of your errors and confess your crimes, as the only atonement you can make to that society whose laws you have outraged."

"Well, ma'am," responded the Magsman, who fully comprehended her motive, and therefore answered her in a respectful tone, "I take your advice as it is meant, that is, in good part. But I should wish you to tell me what mercy I am likely to receive by making any confession at all."

Mrs. Brace proceeded to expatiate on the necessity of the prisoner's averting his thoughts and hopes from this world and fixing them all upon the next; and while she was thus playing the hypocrite for a particular purpose, Harriet, who had already been duly instructed by her mistress, was engaging the attention of Soper in the passage. She asked a thousand questions connected with the prison, and so ably succeeded in occupying him for several minutes, that the milliner easily found the wished-for opportunity of slipping a small parcel into the Magsman's hand, continuing her religious exhortation until he had safely secured it about his own person.

"Well, ma'am," he observed at last, "I've listened to you with the respect due to a lady of your appearance; but I really don't wish to hear any more. As for confession, that's all gammon; and if I must swing, I shall die game."

Mrs. Brace lifted her hands, as if in despair of converting

him, and, turning away, issued from the cell. Mr. Soper closed the massive door, locked and bolted it again, and then conducted the milliner and her attendant to the other quarters of the prison.

But thither we shall not follow them. Suffice it to say that, having inspected the remainder of the gaol, the visitors took their departure, leaving Mr. Soper well contented with the recompense which he had received for his trouble.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIES OF OLD PAINTINGS

IN the times whereof we are writing, the house which stood next to Newgate, in the street that borrows its name from the prison, was occupied by a picture-dealer. This house was about fifteen feet higher than the gaol; and a person might easily let himself down from the roof of the former to the leads of the latter.

The picture-dealer was a man considerably advanced in years; or, to speak more accurately, he was verging upon sixty-five. He was a widower, had no children, and, being excessively parsimonious, kept but a small establishment in the shape of domestics. An old woman performed the duties of housekeeper, cook, and maid-of-all-work; a slipshod, hungry-looking boy attended in the shop when his master was otherwise engaged; and the third floor was occupied by an artist whom the picture-dealer retained constantly in his employment for purposes which will almost immediately transpire.

Mr. Shrubsole — for that was the euphonious name of the picture-dealer — was a tall, thin man, with a pale countenance, a bald head fringed with white hair, and large eyes of that dull hue which, being a mixture of light gray and green, gave them the appearance of having been boiled. His mouth had fallen in, because he had not a single tooth left in his head; and his nose being particularly pointed, the outlines of his profile were sharp and angular. His attire was a seedy suit of black, which age and dirt had rendered rusty and brown; and he usually wore an apron dingy in hue and smeared with paint and varnish. Add a massive pair of silver spectacles, with large circular glasses, to his countenance, and huge buckles of the same metal to his

shoes, and you have before your eyes a complete portraiture of Mr. Shrubsole.

The shop was narrow, but high and long. The windows were very seldom cleaned, the floor never; and the ceiling was as black as a ceiling, that once was white, well could be. The place was always involved in a semiobscurity, even in the most glorious summer's day; but in the winter-time it was particularly sombre. This, however, the old man was wont to represent as the very best light in which real judges and connoisseurs could possibly wish to view paintings; and when evening came, or a fog prevailed in the City, he would distribute half a dozen wretched candles, twenty to the pound, about the shop, and then vow that it was a perfect illumination.

Notwithstanding the sordid appearance of the shop itself, it contained a great number of paintings. All the different schools, whether ancient or modern, were represented in that congress of pictures; and it seemed as if all imaginable subjects and branches of the art had exercised the right of universal suffrage to send suitable members to that assembly. Portraits, landscapes, naval and military battles, river-scenes, animals, flowers, cities, ruins, angels, devils, historical and religious designs, — in a word, every description of subject might be viewed and selected in Mr. Shrubsole's "gallery of art." And if the visitor were not satisfied with what he beheld on the ground floor, he was escorted to the first and second stories, all the rooms of which were likewise filled with pictures.

Any individual who was not somewhat initiated in the mysteries of Mr. Shrubsole's trade would have fancied that he possessed the finest collection of paintings in all the world, and that he must be a man of enormous wealth. For Raphaels, Michael Angelos, Correggios, Titians, Guidos, Rembrandts, Vandykes, Claudes, Poussins, Murillos, Hogarths, etc., were as plentiful in Mr. Shrubsole's establishment as blackberries on any hedge in England at the proper season.

We shall presently ascertain how it was that Mr. Shrubsole became possessed of such splendid pictures, all by the great masters; but before we enter more profoundly into the mysteries of his trade, we must observe that at the farther end of the shop, and in the very darkest nook, there hung in

a massive frame a piece of canvas painted all over a very dark and dingy brown, unrelieved by a single shade or outline indicative of a picture.

It was midday; and Mr. Shrubsole was in his shop, surveying the various masterpieces with an ineffable complacency, while the boy was getting his dinner behind a Vandyke that was leaning against the wall.

Presently a short, stout, elderly, pragmatical gentleman entered the establishment; and, tapping the ferrule of his gold-headed cane sharply upon the floor, he said, "A friend of mine has placed your catalogue in my hands; and I have come to see the pictures accordingly. But mind, I'm a tolerable good judge, I flatter myself, and I shall very soon discover whether they are the originals or only copies."

"If you find any copies here, sir," responded Shrubsole, "I'll eat 'em."

"Well, you can say nothing fairer," observed the gentleman, taking the picture-dealer's answer very seriously; and, placing himself in an attentive attitude, he began to survey the large painting behind which the boy was devouring a sausage and slice of bread.

"Splendid altar-piece, that!" said Mr. Shrubsole, after a pause. "The great master's hand visible in every tint, characteristic brilliancy of style, splendour and richness of colouring, eh? Look at that saint in the foreground, — he literally seems to stand out of the canvas."

Still the elderly gentleman made no reply, but kept his looks intently fixed upon the painting, just for all the world as if he were criticizing it most minutely. But Mr. Shrubsole had already seen through him as completely as if his entire form were made of glass; and the wily old fellow knew that his customer was one of those self-sufficient, conceited, and purse-proud individuals who affect to be connoisseurs in an art of which they are utterly ignorant.

"That masterpiece," continued Shrubsole, "was painted by Vandyke for the cathedral at Genoa. There it remained until three years ago, when a new altar was erected; and the picture was sold for a thousand guineas to a Genoese nobleman. The nobleman sent it as a present to King George III; but his Majesty not admiring Catholic subjects, gave it to my Lord Skimmington. His lordship gave it to his mistress, Signora Borlini, the famous singer; and she,

being in want of cash the other day, sold it to me. I can let it go for five hundred, and that is dirt cheap."

"It is not dear, Mr. Shrubsole, I admit," said the elderly gentleman, at last breaking silence, and turning slowly around with a very knowing air. "No, it is not dear. It's a real Vandyke; you couldn't deceive me if it wasn't, I can tell you. It's certainly a splendid thing. The saint, as you say, in the foreground, is admirable; he seems to be absolutely walking into the background. Ah! you perceive I'm rather a good judge of pictures, eh?" added the elderly gentleman, with a knowing wink of the left eye.

"I was certain of that, sir, the very first moment you began to look at my Vandyke," said Mr. Shrubsole. "You surveyed it with the air and manner of a connoisseur."

"Well, I think I do know a good picture when I see one," returned the elderly gentleman, highly delighted at the compliment paid him. "Come, I don't mind saying four hundred guineas for the Vandyke — cheque at sight."

"I couldn't do it, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Shrubsole; then, in a milder tone, he added, "No, I couldn't do it, really, much as I like dealing with any gentleman who knows how to value and appreciate fine paintings — as you do, sir."

"Well, well, I see I must not beat you down too much," resumed the customer, still more highly flattered by this last appeal to his vanity. "Let us say four hundred and fifty, — and then, perhaps, I may be induced to purchase another picture before I leave the shop."

"On those conditions we can agree," said Mr. Shrubsole.

"Good!" ejaculated the pragmatical gentleman, while the ferrule of his stick again rang sharply on the floor. "Now let me examine some more of this really fine collection. Have you a good Rembrandt?"

"Behold!" said the picture-dealer, pointing to a portrait of a Delilah, which was almost a mass of black, with a vivid streak of light stretching from the upper corner on the left hand, and ceasing at the lady's nose, one side of which it perfectly irradiated, while the other was as dark as if it had never been painted at all.

"Fine — very fine — splendid effect!" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, after a long scrutiny and an equally protracted silence. "Wonderful conception — sublime creation! But I have heard, in fact I know, that there are

Rembrandts in which the light is not so vividly portrayed. For my opinion is, Mr. Shrubsole," he added, with a remarkably knowing air, "that the dark pictures are the finest specimens of the old masters. I mean, you understand," he continued, pompously, "those magnificent works in which the colours are — ahem! — so deep and the shades so — so — ahem! — so solemn and imposing in their obscurity, that to the inexperienced eye the whole picture seems nothing more or less than a black mass, whereas we, Mr. Shrubsole, we, who are connoisseurs, can soon distinguish the fine portrait like an angelic countenance peeping forth from the midst of a night intensely dark."

"Ah! my dear sir," exclaimed the picture-dealer, throwing into his hatchet-face as warm an expression of rapture as such mummy features could possibly assume, "you do indeed enjoy an intimate acquaintance with the peculiarities of style and the sublime characteristics which distinguished the old masters. You are an enthusiast, like me. Come, then, my dear sir, come, and feast your eyes upon the most magnificent specimen of the art which the immortal Rembrandt has left behind him."

"Is it possible that you possess such a specimen?" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, working himself up into a perfect fit of enthusiasm.

"I do indeed, sir," responded Shrubsole; and, lighting a miserable candle, he led the way to the extremity of the shop. "There, sir, there, brother connoisseur!" he ejaculated, in a tone of triumph, and pointing to the canvas which we have already described as being painted all over a very dark and dingy brown, and not having the slightest trace of any picture at all.

The elderly gentleman planted himself at what he conceived to be a proper distance in order to view the magnificent work of art; and a feeling of profound respect and veneration came over him as he fixed his eyes on the canvas. His countenance assumed a very solemn expression; and he gazed long, intently, and silently. As a matter of course, he could distinguish nothing; all was a dark and obscure void. But not for worlds would he have compromised his reputation as a connoisseur by turning around to the picture-dealer and frankly exclaiming, "May I be hanged if I can trace a single thing or discover a single outline!"

"You have placed yourself in an admirable position to see it to advantage," said Mr. Shrubsole, making his own stand near the frame which enclosed the daub, and holding the candle high up. "There! now you catch the light upon the countenance. Does it not appear gradually to reveal itself to you, like a person emerging slowly from the mouth of a dark cavern? Now you begin to see the richness of the colouring: mark the lifelike effect with which the cheeks are painted, behold the expression of those speaking eyes! Ah! now the light falls on the nose, and you catch the perfect outline of the profile! Some people — clever men, too — have declared that the picture is a trifle more sombre than it ought to be; but you and I, sir, know better. You, at least, can appreciate the beauty, the excellence, the magnificence of this inimitable painting."

"Yes, it is indeed wonderful!" observed the elderly gentleman, shaking his head solemnly, but at the same time fruitlessly straining his eyes to catch even the remotest glimpse of a single one of all the features which the picture-dealer had enumerated; and, for the life of him, he could not conceive what on earth the subject of the painting might be.

But he dared not ask a question, he dared not suffer it to appear that he was in a state of complete mental obfuscation; for if he seemed even for a single moment to be in the dark concerning that picture, — as indeed he most assuredly was, — his reputation as a connoisseur would be destroyed for ever. Vainly did he torture his imagination to persuade itself that he really did see something. No, the canvas was an awful void, or rather, a mass of unvaried darkness save where the glimmer of the farthing candle flickered upon it; and yet Mr. Shrubsole said it was a picture, and gazed upon it as if it were, and therefore a picture, thought the elderly gentleman, it certainly must be!

"Well, my dear sir, are you not delighted? Are you not enraptured?" exclaimed Mr. Shrubsole, after another long and solemn silence. "Do you not feel an enthusiasm glowing in your veins? Do you not experience a sensation as if you could fall down and worship that masterpiece of the immortal Rembrandt? Ah! my dear sir, to a connoisseur like you this is indeed the richest of treats, far, far exceeding the most luxurious banquet!"

"I confess that I am lost, bewildered, confused, astounded," said the elderly gentleman, — and most assuredly he was. "I mean, I am amazed by the magnificence —"

"Oh, I can comprehend your feelings, my dear sir," interrupted the picture-dealer. "Do you not long to become the owner of this treasure?"

"What is the sum?" demanded the elderly gentleman; for he felt convinced that if he could make nothing of the subject of the painting, his family and friends would be equally in the dark, and he knew that his reputation as a connoisseur would rise to the very zenith by the mere fact of possessing a picture of such extraordinary merit that no one could understand it.

"Alas! my dear sir," said Mr. Shrubsole, forcing himself to heave a profound sigh, "the badness of the times, the flatness of business, the state of the money market, all combine to induce me to part with my Rembrandt for a mere song. Five hundred guineas, not a farthing less, and even then it will cost me a pang to lose my Rembrandt."

"Five hundred guineas you shall have," said the elderly gentleman, emphatically. "It would be a desecration and a sacrilege to attempt to beat you down. But, of course — that is, my dear sir — I suppose," added the customer, with a slight embarrassment in his tone and manner, "you can get a paragraph inserted in the newspapers to the effect — ahem! — that your most valuable Vandyke and your Rembrandt masterpiece have been purchased — ahem! — for a large sum by — ahem! — that liberal amateur and well-known connoisseur, Sir Brinksby Bull."

"What! is it indeed the famous Sir Slinksby Pull who has thus honoured my gallery by his presence?" cried the old picture-dealer, affecting to survey his customer with the deepest reverence, mingled with admiration; although, to tell the truth, he had never in his life heard the name before, and had even now caught it so imperfectly that he made a sad mess of the euphonious nomenclature when attempting to repeat it. "Then I am glad that my two best paintings have fallen to the possession of one who will know how to value them. My dear sir," he continued, "you have acquired perfect treasures this day. The pictures shall be dusted and cleaned, and sent to your mansion in the course of the week."

"Very good, Mr. Shrubsole!" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, who was a retired grocer, and having been mayor of some town when the corporation thereof presented an address to the king, had received the honour of knighthood, since which occurrence he had settled, with Lady Brinksby Bull and all the little Brinksby Bulls, in a square at the West End of London, where he gave grand parties and set himself up as a patron of the fine arts; although, as the reader may very well conceive, he was a much better judge of muscovado than of pictures.

However, Sir Brinksby wrote a check for nine hundred and fifty guineas, left his address, and strode pompously away, thinking how he should astonish all his friends and aristocratic acquaintances with his magnificent Rembrandt.

The moment the knight's back was turned, Mr. Shrubsole rubbed his hands smartly together, and chuckled in a low, mumbling tone, as old gentlemen are wont to do when they are hugely delighted; and having thus demonstrated his satisfaction, he exclaimed, "Now, Tom, where are you?"

"Here, sir," said a short, pale, thin, and dirty-looking urchin, as he emerged from behind the great picture.

"You must mind the shop for a little while," continued his master. "And remember, if any one comes in, this portrait is Admiral Drake," he added, pointing to a bluff-looking naval officer, with a small cocked hat perched on the top of a large wig.

"Why, sir, I thought he was Van Trump," exclaimed the boy.

"Van Tromp you mean!" cried Mr. Shrubsole. "Well, he has been Van Tromp for the last three weeks, and no one will buy a Dutch admiral. So we must see whether the public can be tempted with an English one. And this portrait," continued the picture-dealer, pointing to a military commander, "has been Prince Eugene long enough. No one cares a curse about Prince Eugene. Let him be the Duke of Marlborough. Have we got a Marquis of Granby?"

"The last that Mr. Woodfall painted, sir, was sold yesterday," answered the boy.

"Well, this Marshal Turenne must be a Granby, then, in case anybody wants one. And while I think of it, Tom," added Mr. Shrubsole, "that Rubens in the window there had better be a Titian; and this picture which Mr. Woodfall

painted last week, and which we baked yesterday, must be a Michael Angelo. Now, shall you remember all these instructions? "

" To be sure I shall, sir," returned the lad, with a knowing leer.

" Well, I've done a good afternoon's business, and here's a penny for you," said Mr. Shrubsole, placing the copper coin as carefully in the boy's hand as if it were a guinea which he was fearful might drop and roll between the boards.

Having thus given the poor half-starved wretch a proof of his liberality, the picture-dealer ascended several flights of narrow, dark, and dilapidated stairs, and ultimately reached the third floor. There he entered a front room in which several pictures, resting on their easels, were distributed about. These works of art were in various stages toward completion; and their subjects were as varied and their respective style as different as those which were displayed for sale in the shop and apartments beneath. In fact, it was in this room that all Mr. Shrubsole's Raphaels, Michael Angelos, Correggios, Titians, Guidos, Rembrandts, Vandykes, Claudes, Poussins, Murillos, and Hogarths were composed and manufactured; and from that sordid-looking studio flowed the stream of " masterpieces " that supplied the picture-galleries of the aristocratic and wealthy class throughout England.

And who was the artist that combined in his own person a glimmering reflection of the talents of all those great masters? The reader may perhaps suspect that the paintings were the veriest daubs in the universe, but such, indeed, they were not. On the contrary, they evinced immense skill, a profound acquaintance with the style of those originals of which they were imitations, and no small experience in producing fine effects. In a word, genius was stamped upon each and all; and if that genius were far inferior to the assemblage of models which it kept in view, it was, nevertheless, of no common order.

In the workshop, or studio, which we have just seen Mr. Shrubsole enter, a young man was busily employed with his palette and brushes. He was tall, thin, but symmetrical in proportions, and of a genteel appearance. His countenance was pale, without being absolutely sickly; and his large dark eyes flashed with the fire of genius. Coal-black

hair, silky and glossy as that of a woman, curled naturally above the high, noble, and intellectual forehead over which it was parted; and his whiskers, of the same jetty dye, met beneath his chin, the oval countenance thus being framed in ebony. His delicately pencilled brows were finely arched, he had the short and slightly curved upper lip which denoted a haughty disposition, and his teeth were remarkably white and even. His toilet was plain, and even homely; but his linen was perfectly clean, his boots well blacked, and his clothes carefully brushed. When at work, he wore an apron, which reached half-way up his chest; and altogether his appearance was so neat and interesting that it not only contrasted strongly with the miserable aspect of the apartment, but was also widely different from the slovenliness and neglect which usually characterize men of that profession.

This young artist, whose age was certainly not more than five and twenty, was named George Woodfall; and he it was, who, for a remuneration ridiculously moderate, touched up and altered the old pictures which his employer bought at sales and elsewhere, and likewise painted new ones. In fact, he was the author of the Michael Angelos, Rembrandts, and other "masterpieces" which Mr. Shrubsole disposed of as originals, and for which he obtained large sums.

"Well, my dear George," said the picture-dealer, as he entered the room, "hard at work, eh? Nothing like it, nothing like it! I have just sold the Vandyke — the 'Saints,' you know. Let me see: that painting I bought at a sale in Wardour Street, and then you touched it up."

"Touched it up!" exclaimed the young man, indignantly. "I made it what it is. I converted it from a vile daub into something which, at all events, you have managed to pass off as a Vandyke. But how much did you obtain for it?" he asked, in a milder tone.

"A mere trifle, forty guineas," answered Shrubsole, telling this great falsehood without a blush and without the quivering of a muscle of his countenance. "I shall add half a guinea to your wages on Saturday night; I can't do more, as times go."

"Wages! Do you look upon me as a servant?" cried Woodfall, grinding his teeth. "Call it pittance, stipend, income, salary, anything you choose, but not wages!"

"Well, well, I didn't mean to offend you, George," said the picture-dealer, trembling at the young man's excitement. "But I have something else to inform you this afternoon. I've sold a Rembrandt."

"Which?" demanded Woodfall.

"Whichever you like to make it," responded Mr. Shrubsole, with a chuckling laugh.

"Ah! I see, you have been playing off the black canvas on the imagination of some simpleton," observed the young man. "Well, I can scarcely blame you. The world are so vain and conceited that they deserve to be taken in. Sooner than confess themselves ignorant, they will affect to see a picture where no picture exists. Oh, the contemptible fools, the drivelling idiots!"

"Come, don't excite yourself on that account, my dear young friend," said Mr. Shrubsole, laying his long, lean, withered hand upon the shoulder of the tall, graceful young man.

"Not I indeed," exclaimed Woodfall, with a contemptuous curl of the lip. "These miserable *ignorami* are not worth a sneer. But how much did you get from your customer by persuading him into the belief that a dark canvas was a splendid painting?"

"A trifle, a mere trifle, thirty guineas," responded Shrubsole, telling lie the second. "But I shall add another half-guinea to your wa — salary," he cried, hastily correcting himself, "next Saturday night. Come, you must paint in a female saint or some such thing on the dark canvas. A quarter of an hour in the oven will then give it a few cracks all over, and bestow an ancient appearance on it; and perhaps we shall use a little megylp or turpentine to subdue the freshness of the colouring, and make it look a leetle black and dirty."

"I will go down and fetch up the canvas at once," said Woodfall.

"Eh! that's a dear good young man. Lose no time about it. I'll just look at the pictures you've been working on to-day, till you come up again."

And while Mr. Shrubsole turned toward the partially finished paintings on their easels, the talented artist descended into the shop.

"Tom," he said, immediately accosting the boy, into

whose hand he slipped a shilling, "how much did your master receive for that Vandyke?"

"Four hundred and fifty guineas, sir," was the reply.

"And for the pretended Rembrandt?" was Woodfall's next query.

"Five hundred guineas, sir," answered the lad.

"Thank you, Tom; you are a good boy, a very good boy," observed the artist, in a low and hurried tone, for he was afraid of being overheard by the picture-dealer. "And who was the purchaser?"

"Sir Brinksby Bull," returned Tom.

George Woodfall drew forth his pocketbook, made a few hasty memoranda, and then proceeded to carry the daubed canvas up to his workshop on the third floor.

By nine o'clock in the evening the outlines of a heavenly face had been sketched on that canvas; for the young artist worked unweariedly until the old female domestic called him to supper. This meal was served in the kitchen; and on the present occasion it was somewhat more bounteous in quantity and inviting in quality than usual, for the picture-dealer was slightly moved to liberality by the good business he had done that day.

After supper Mr. Shrubsole despatched the servant to the nearest tavern for two bottles of wine; and the party, consisting of the picture-dealer himself, the artist, the domestic, and the boy, sat drinking and conversing until the booming bell of St. Sepulchre's Church proclaimed the hour of eleven.

"Now, then, to bed!" exclaimed Mr. Shrubsole, rising from his seat with a partial degree of difficulty, and staggering somewhat as he extended his hand to grasp the chamber candle.

At this moment there was a loud and imperious double knock at the street door; and the domestic hastened to respond to the summons. Those who remained behind in the kitchen heard her ascend the stairs, open the door, answer a few questions put to her by several voices, both male and female, and then admit the visitors into the passage, the door immediately afterward closing behind them. All this did Mr. Shrubsole, George Woodfall, and the boy Tom hear as plainly as possible in the kitchen below; but suddenly a dead silence succeeded, and not another sound reached

them after the echoes raised by the shutting of the street door had died away.

"This is very ex — tri — traordinary," murmured Mr. Shrubsole, glancing with a kind of vacant uneasiness at the artist. "I could swear — hic — that — I — I heard people come — hic — into the — hic — hic — house."

"I will go and see," said Woodfall; and, hastening out of the kitchen, he ascended the stairs.

It struck both the picture-dealer and Tom that they heard something like a short scuffle in the passage overhead; but, if it were so, the conflict ceased almost instantaneously and was unmarked by a single cry for assistance. A solemn silence again prevailed; and uselessly did Shrubsole hold his breath in the hope of catching the sounds of George Woodfall's returning footsteps. It appeared as if both the servant and the artist had been spirited away by some supernatural agency; for not a sound was heard, no, not even the rustling of a dress!

"Tom, Tom, the devil's in the house," whispered the picture-dealer, pretty well sobered by the terror arising from the mysterious occurrences of the last few minutes.

"Lord bless ye, sir!" returned the boy, "I'll be bound it's only a bit of fun of some kind or another. I'm not afraid."

And away he rushed up the staircase, purposely making his hobnailed shoes clatter as heavily as he could upon the steps. The picture-dealer listened with suspended breath. He could tell when the boy reached the passage, and there he suddenly stopped. At the same instant, a sharp noise, like that of a man's hand slapping a face or striking with the flat of the palm against a wall, fell on Shrubsole's ear. A short, rapid scuffle followed; and then all was still throughout the house, and silent as the grave.

The old man sank down upon a chair, gasping for breath; while his countenance, as the flickering gleams of a wretched candle played upon it, was hideous with the workings of excessive terror. His limbs trembled convulsively, his lips, white and bloodless, quivered like aspens, and his eyes glared wildly in the direction of the door leading to the dark staircase, as if he every moment expected that some grisly spectre would come forth from the obscurity.

Suddenly he started up; his fears goaded him to despera-

tion, and desperation gave him courage. Thieves might be plundering his house, while he was sitting helplessly and pusillanimously in the kitchen.

Taking up the light, he ascended the stairs, holding the candle high above his head, so as to throw its rays forward. But scarcely had he mounted half a dozen steps, when something whizzed through the air, apparently coming from the passage; and in a moment the candle was struck from the old man's hand.

Uttering a loud cry, he fell back senseless; and when consciousness slowly returned, he found himself seated by the kitchen fire, on which more coals had evidently been heaped. At the same instant, he became aware that he was fastened by a strong cord, which bound him, hand and foot, to the armchair wherein he had been so considerably placed.

A candle, the very one which had been dashed from his grasp by the well-aimed missile, was burning on the table; and around the kitchen did Mr. Shrubsole now glance hastily. His fears, if his selfishness allowed him to entertain any apart from those which concerned his property and his gold, were immediately relieved in respect to the artist, the old female dependent, and the boy Tom; for these three individuals were his companions, but each bound, like himself, to a chair.

"What — how — when —" stammered the bewildered picture-dealer, anxious to ask questions, but unable to find words to frame them.

"Silence!" exclaimed a sharp, imperious female voice close behind Mr. Shrubsole's chair; and at the same instant he felt something cold touch the back of his neck.

Throwing his body forward as far as the cords would permit, he hastily turned his head and beheld a woman, with a black crape mask over her countenance and a pair of horse-pistols in her hands, evidently mounting guard upon the four prisoners.

"Hold your tongue, and no harm shall happen to you, sir," continued the woman. "No robbery is intended, and it will be your fault if violence or bloodshed should ensue. Raise but your voice one note higher than you have already spoken, and I will send a bullet through your head without an instant's hesitation."

And again she placed the cold muzzle of a pistol behind

his ear; for this woman appeared to play with the murderous weapons as if they had been familiar toys from her very birth.

"In fact, the shortest plan and the best," she continued, "is not to speak at all. This I have recommended to your three fellow prisoners; and they are wisely following my counsel."

"Think not, woman," observed the young artist, irritated by this observation, "that my silence is occasioned by fear of you or your pistols. But, bound as I am to the chair, you may well suppose that I have little inclination to open my lips in discourse."

"I will give you credit, sir, for any motive you please, so long as you do not speak too loud," said the woman.

George Woodfall made no answer; but a hollow moan escaped the picture-dealer, while the female servant heaved a profound sigh. As for the boy Tom, he dozed off into a comfortable nap; and a deep silence now reigned in the kitchen and throughout the house.

CHAPTER IV

JOE WARREN IN NEWGATE

WE must now return to the Magsman, whom we left at the moment when Mrs. Brace, with a studied hypocrisy assumed in order to blind Mr. Soper, raised her hands and eyes in apparent despair at the prisoner's hardened nature.

The heavy door clanged again upon the solitary occupant of that cell. He heard the key turn in the lock and the bolts shoot into their sockets, and then he waited until the sounds of the retreating footsteps died away in the passage.

But so soon as all was still — save the low rumbling of the vehicles in the adjacent street — the Magsman lost no more time ere he examined the parcel which his wife had so dexterously slipped into his hand. The contents thereof were as follows:

1. A map, or plan, of Newgate.
2. A small file.
3. Four stout and well-pointed nails.
4. A cord of twisted silk, not much thicker than common string, but strong enough to sustain an immense weight.
5. Three pieces of iron, each about four inches in length and of the thickness of the thumb, and which were made to screw together so as to form a small but effective crowbar, or "jimmy."

6. A little piece of putty, mixed with black lead.

Such were the contents of the parcel; and, although miscellaneous and numerous, they were easily packed into a very limited compass. A grim smile of satisfaction passed over the Magsman's countenance as he examined those articles, one after the other; and, having secured the file, the nails, the ball of silken cord, the disjointed jimmy, and the scrap of paper containing the morsel of putty, about

his person, he proceeded to study and scrutinize the plan of Newgate.

We have already stated that he was confined in that condemned cell which stood last in the row of five on the ground floor; and the map now before him showed that his cell was, as he had already suspected it to be, in the north-eastern angle of the gaol. The loophole looked upon Newgate Street; and the people passing along that thoroughfare, under the frowning wall, were within a yard of him. The eastern side of his dungeon joined Mr. Shrubsole's house.

We have also informed the reader that there were five condemned cells overhead, on the first floor; and another row of cells higher still, on the second floor: consequently there were two rooms between the ceiling of the Magsman's dungeon and the roof of the prison.

Having thus examined those details of the plan which especially concerned himself, the Magsman thrust the map into his pocket, and drew forth the file. This little instrument, scarcely larger than the blade of a penknife, was as admirably tempered as a watch-spring. The Magsman bent it into a complete circle, and it flew back into unimpaired straightness; and he knew thereby that a Sheffield workshop, and no imitative London manufactory, had produced the file.

Seating himself on the pavement floor, and having spread his handkerchief to catch the glistening particles of metal, the Magsman began to file one of the huge links of his massive chains. To one less courageous, persevering, and experienced than himself, the task now undertaken would have appeared about as hopeful as an attempt to pull down a house with a nail; but Joe Warren knew well what he had to achieve, and the amount of work which the trusty file, with its sharp and irresistible teeth, could accomplish.

Presently, the clock of St. Sepulchre struck one. It was dinner-time, and the Magsman hastened to conceal the file and gather up his handkerchief. Then, into the space which the file had opened in the half-severed link, he put some of the putty, which being black and shining, corresponded so well with the iron that the most keen and piercing eyes could not have detected the process which was in operation.

Scarcely was this little arrangement made, when heavy

footsteps were heard in the echoing passage, the bolts were drawn, the door was opened, and the man Soper appeared with a covered dish in one hand and a pot of beer in the other.

"Your friends take good care of you, old feller," said the gaol functionary, as he removed the cover from the dish, more out of curiosity than politeness. "Roast fowl, sassages, mashed tatures, and new bread — my eyes! don't you come it strong? A quart of strong beer, too. Well, you ain't very much to be pitied, I don't think. Your grub is a deuced sight better than gaol allowance."

"Will you sit down and have some dinner with me?" asked the Magsman.

"Can't stop, or else I would," responded Soper. "But I don't mind a drop of beer," and, with these words, he took a tolerably long draught. "I say, old feller," he observed, setting down the pot and wiping his mouth with his coat-sleeve, "your trial comes on the day arter to-morrow. I've just seed the calendar."

"Well, it can't be helped," said the Magsman. "I've made my mind up to the worst."

"The very best thing you can do," responded Mr. Soper, intending his remark to be of a consolatory nature. "What a precious fine woman that was which I showed around the gaol just now! Such eyes, and such teeth, and such a bust! She give me half a guinea for my trouble. But I'm perwent-ing you from eating your dinner, and I'm a-vastin' my own time. So I'll be off now and come back in twenty minutes or so for the things."

Soper accordingly retired, locking and bolting the door carefully after him. For, with all his apparent familiarity and good feeling toward the Magsman, and with all the characteristic avarice of an official, he was incorruptible in this capacity; and no money which Joe Warren or his friends had it in their power to offer would have induced him to wink or connive at an escape. Indeed, during the short time he had remained in the cell, his eyes had travelled rapidly, but keenly and searchingly, over every link in the Magsman's chains; and had he caught the faintest glimpse of anything calculated to excite his suspicions, he would have immediately summoned an assistant who had accompanied him as far as the entrance of the passage, and the most rigid investigation would have been the result.

However, his penetration and shrewdness were baffled for once; and the Magsman chuckled inwardly as he sat down to the enjoyment of the roast fowl, the sausages, the mashed potatoes, and the porter, which an eating-house in the Old Bailey had supplied. We should, however, observe that the fowl and sausages had been previously cut up into pieces, the potatoes turned over with a spoon, and even the very beer poured from one pot into another, by the busy hands of Mr. Soper, to assure himself that no file or watch-spring was secreted amongst the articles intended for the prisoner's dinner.

The Magsman understood the meaning of all this, and knew that a strict watch was kept upon him; but he was very far from despairing of his escape, and as he devoured his food with a ravenous appetite, he said to himself, "To-morrow I shall not dine in Newgate."

At the expiration of about twenty minutes, Soper returned to take away the dishes and pewter pot, all of which Joe Warren had cleared; and when the door again closed upon him and he was once more alone, he knew that he had four hours and a half to work in before he should experience another interruption.

And with such hearty good will did the Magsman ply the irresistible file, that by the time St. Sepulchre's Church struck six in the evening, two-thirds of the labour was accomplished in respect to the massive chains with which he was laden. The booming of the bell, as it proclaimed that hour, was the signal for him to desist again; and, having concealed the file and filled up the severed portion of the links with the black putty, he lay down on the iron bedstead and affected to have been sleeping when Mr. Soper reappeared with his supper and a candle.

A few remarks were interchanged; and the Magsman was left to the enjoyment of his meal. In twenty minutes Soper returned to fetch the plate and pewter pot; and Warren had then two hours wherein to continue his operations until the official should make his last round for the night.

During these two hours the Magsman filed almost completely through each of the four links which it was necessary to sever in order to enable himself to throw off his chains at the proper time; and he had scarcely filled up the places

with the remains of his blackened putty when Soper entered the cell. The man examined the shackles all over, and appeared quite satisfied that they had not been tampered with. He then wished the Magsman good night, and took his departure, double-locking the door, and securely fastening all the bolts.

The candle, having been sent in from the coffee-house which supplied the Magsman's meals, was not taken away from him; for, in the times of which we are writing, untried prisoners were permitted the use of lights until a late hour, and Mr. Soper saw by the length of the candle that it would not burn much beyond eleven o'clock.

The Magsman resolved to wait until the church of St. Sepulchre should have struck nine, ere he commenced the grand operations which he hoped would result in his escape. There was the possibility, though certainly not the probability, that Soper might take it into his head to pay him another visit that evening; but he felt confident that if the official came at all, it would be at nine o'clock.

Slowly, slowly passed that hour, during which the Magsman weighed, with some anxiety, all the chances for and against his escape. At one moment he dreaded lest Soper suspected his intentions; at another he feared that his friends might fail in accomplishing their portion of the work in the picture-dealer's house. Then his blood ran cold in his veins as the idea struck him that the implements which he possessed and the short time that he could command were totally inadequate for the immensity of the task that must be accomplished; and even when he reasoned himself into confidence on these heads, another source of alarm presented itself. What if some prisoner had been placed, during the day, in the cell overhead, or in the cell higher up still?

"No, it isn't likely," thought the Magsman to himself. "No one has been condemned to death yet during this session; and if there was, the ground floor cells would be filled first."

Again did the voice of his own fears suggest, in whispering tones, that desperate characters like himself might have been incarcerated during the last few hours in the cells above.

"Well, and if so," was his self-solacing argument, "any fellow that I might fall against in such a position would be

only too glad to seize the opportunity of escaping along with me."

Scarcely had he arrived at this conclusion, when the clock struck nine; and no intrusive step approached the door of his cell.

He waited ten minutes longer; and still all was quiet, save the rumbling of the carts and hackney-coaches in Newgate Street.

"Now for it!" exclaimed the Magsman to himself; and, with a comparatively slight effort, he broke off his chains.

A weight seemed to be lifted from his heart in a moment; it bounded with an elasticity which scattered all remaining doubts and fears to the winds. He felt as if half of his freedom were already accomplished, and that it only depended on himself to consummate the rest. Had he imbibed a tumblerful of brandy, the effects could not have been more exhilarating.

Without losing a moment unnecessarily, Joe Warren screwed the three pieces of the jimmy together. He then drew the iron bedstead as noiselessly as possible into the middle of the cell, and lifted it up on one end. By means of the chair he mounted on the headboard, which was uppermost; and now, through the deep loophole of his dungeon, he could see the lights in the houses on the opposite side of Newgate Street. Yes, and he beheld the people passing in both directions; and the forms of the drivers seated outside their vehicles were borne rapidly by. Life and bustle were without, solitude and death within; and he must escape — oh, he must escape, from the gloom and the danger of the latter, to join once more the companionship and the pleasures of the former!

We have already stated that the cell had a vaulted roof; and consequently the centre thereof was the thinnest part. Mounted on the upraised bedstead, the Magsman attacked with his crowbar the solid masonry overhead, loosening the mortar as well as he was able around the key-stone of the arched ceiling. The task was by no means easy; for the mortar had hardened into the callosity of the granite blocks which it held together, the position in which Warren was forced to labour was an awkward one, and the dust of the disturbed lime fell into his eyes.

Nevertheless he toiled courageously on in spite of these

disadvantages; and in half an hour a large stone next to the central one was dislodged. The first breach having been made, materially facilitated the ensuing operations. The key-stone itself was soon removed, and by ten o'clock a considerable excavation was formed in the middle of the ceiling, so that the Magsman could feel with his hand the lower side of a flagstone in the pavement of the cell overhead.

To raise this flag was no easy matter. It was necessary to clear away all the masonry adhering to those parts where it joined the circumjacent stones, from which it had to be separated by the jimmy. But at length this labour was accomplished; and the Magsman, to his infinite joy, found the flag yield to his vigorous upward pressure.

He moved it away from the mouth of the aperture which he had thus formed; and, without any difficulty, the adventurous Magsman passed through that opening into the cell immediately above his own. He dared not take the candle with him, for if any official of the prison should happen to be passing along Newgate Street and observe a light streaming from the loophole of a room which he knew to be unoccupied at the time, a suspicion that something wrong was going on would instantly be followed by a search, the result of which must, as a matter of course, prove fatal to the Magsman's enterprise.

In the dark, therefore, did he hastily grope about the cell into which he had thus worked his way, and, to his joy, he discovered that it contained an iron bedstead similar to the one which had served him as a scaffolding below. Tilting it up lengthways and mounting on the headboard, as in the former instance, the Magsman renewed his operations by a determined attack on the ceiling of this cell on the first floor.

If his progress were not so rapid as hitherto, and if the necessity of working in the dark materially impeded his operations, nevertheless he found some recompense in the fact that the roof he was now assailing was not near so thick as the one through which he had already passed. Nevertheless, the toil was arduous in the extreme; the dust, getting into his throat, created a burning thirst, and he was several times forced to descend and drink from the large pitcher of water in his own cell. But every piece of mortar

which he broke away and every stone which he removed appeared in his eyes to be another and another obstacle overcome; and, so far from despairing, his hopes acquired strength as time progressed.

Midnight sounded from St. Sepulchre's just as the Magsman succeeded in raising a large flag which covered the excavation he had formed in the vaulted roof of this dungeon on the first floor; and in a few minutes he passed up into the cell overhead. Around the walls, in the total darkness, did he sweep his hands; but, alas! this time he was disappointed, for the place was entirely empty, and there was no iron bedstead to form a scaffolding.

This contingency had, however, been provided for, as the reader will soon find.

Descending into the room beneath, the Magsman thrust the blanket and coverlid (*alias* horse-cloth) belonging to the bed up into the top cell; and mounting thither once more, he resumed his operations with fresh energy, though working in utter darkness.

Using the trusty crowbar as a hammer, he drove two of the four nails which had been sent him into one of the walls, at a distance of five feet from the floor, and about a foot apart from each other. The remaining two he drove into the opposite wall, preserving as nearly as he could guess the same relative position. He then unwound his ball of silken cord, and fastened it from nail to nail, in such a manner that two parallel lines, with an interval of twelve inches, extended from wall to wall; and as the length of the string allowed these lines to be doubled, they were competent to bear a very considerable weight.

The Magsman now folded the blanket and horse-cloth into a sort of square cushion, which he placed upon the lines; and, having without much difficulty seated himself thereon, he was fairly balanced at a height of five feet from the floor, and at a convenient distance from the ceiling, which he now attacked with his crowbar.

One o'clock struck before the intrepid Joe Warren succeeded in moving the first stone. Well-nigh exhausted with the extraordinary exertions he had already made, so parched with thirst that his tongue seemed like a piece of charcoal, and finding his tight-rope scaffold, ingenious though the contrivance might be, most inconvenient for

his operations, the nearer he drew to the threshold of liberty, the greater became the difficulties which he had to encounter.

But still he did his best; and he worked cheerily, cheerily on; nor would he waste time by descending into the cell on the ground floor to slake his burning thirst with the water that was there.

Every now and then he paused for a few moments to listen, and when some suspicious noise met his ears, the Magsman grasped his crowbar all the more tightly, and ground his teeth together, for he was animated with the ferocious resolve to murder the first person who might appear to molest him. But on each occasion his apprehensions proved groundless, and he resumed his toils with a resuscitated energy.

All on a sudden the silken cords snapped in twain, and Joe Warren fell heavily upon the stone pavement.

He was sorely bruised, and for an instant he imagined that one of his legs was broken; but rising slowly and painfully, he shook himself like a lion that has just 'escaped from the pursuit of hunters, and a savage growl burst from his breast.

What was he to do? To mend the lines so as to enable them to bear his weight again, was impossible. A thought struck him! He would descend to the cell beneath and pull the iron bedstead to pieces in order to form a scaffold for the continuation of his labours.

Rolling up the blanket and horse-cloth, and fastening them together so as to constitute a rope, he tied one end around the huge flagstone which he had displaced from the floor of the uppermost cell, and passed the rope through the hole into the dungeon beneath; because when once the iron bedstead should have been broken up, he would lose that means of ascent into the top dungeon again.

Descending into the cell on the first story, he lowered the bedstead to its proper horizontal position, and tried the screws which held the various pieces together. But he was enveloped in darkness, — the candle in his own cell had been extinguished for the last two hours, — and he could not possibly pursue his present operations in such dense obscurity. Gnashing his teeth with rage, and giving vent to horrible imprecations in an undertone, the Magsman again and again tried the screws with his crowbar; but they

were so completely rusted into their sockets, that half an hour was thus passed without producing the slightest effect upon any one of them.

What was he to do? Again he asked himself this question; and, sitting down exhausted on the bed which he had fruitlessly endeavoured to break up, he wiped the perspiration and the dust from his throbbing brows.

The Magsman was perfectly ferocious. He chafed like a starved lion in a cage; he would have ruthlessly murdered any turnkey or prison official who might have appeared at that moment.

Yet something must be done. Time was passing; the hour was already gone by at which his friends expected that he would have succeeded in working his way through the masonry of the top cell, so that only a thin sheet of lead should lie between him and liberty.

What if he were to tear the sacking of the straw mattress into slips, and fasten them to the four nails in the place of the broken cord of silk? Yes, this was the only course which he could now adopt. Had there been a sacking, lashed with ropes in the usual way to the bed, all this trouble and anxiety were spared him; but, alas! the foundation of that bedstead was a thin sheet of iron, supported by cross-bars of the same metal, and on which the mattress lay.

No time was to be lost. With his powerful hands he tore open the mattress, turned out the straw, and rent the coarse stuff into several long slips. These he twisted up and fastened together; and, ascending once more to the top cell, he fixed his new tight-rope apparatus. It answered the purpose even far better than he had expected; and, with reviving spirits, to work the Magsman went again.

The clock struck two as he thus resumed his toils; and he muttered to himself, "If nothing more happens to hinder me, I shall be safe away before that bell speaks again."

Tremendous were the exertions which the Magsman now made to accomplish his purpose. The masonry fell about him in large pieces, the dust involved him in a dense and palpable cloud, floating amidst the darkness, and the perspiration streamed down his face as if water had been poured over his head.

At length, immediately after the fall of a stone which

had resisted his efforts for several minutes, his crowbar struck against the lead which covered the flat roof of the gaol.

Then he paused, and listened with the deepest suspense.

From this cruel and almost agonizing uncertainty he was speedily released; for three low but perfectly audible knocks upon the lead convinced him that his friends were there.

Again he renewed his toils; and every moment the hollow in the ceiling grew larger and larger.

Presently the lead was lifted from over the excavation, the fresh breeze blew upon his burning features, and as he looked up, he saw a countenance bending down over the hole thus formed.

"All right, Mr. Warren, there's nothing to apprehend!" were the reassuring words that met his ears, and which were uttered in the well-known voice of the Kinchin-Grand.

A few minutes' more labour sufficed to widen the aperture sufficiently to enable the strong arms of the Kinchin-Grand, and two powerful men who were also with him, to drag Joe Warren up through the hole, and he now stood upon the leads of Newgate.

A rope, which had been fastened to the chimney of Mr. Shrubsole's house, enabled the escaped felon and his three friends to gain the roof of that dwelling, into which they entered by means of a garret window.

"Now you can refresh yourself with a drop of something short," said the Kinchin-Grand.

The Magsman instinctively thrust out his hand in the dark, and grasped the case-bottle which his faithful and considerate friend thus tendered him. Long and deep was Joe Warren's draught; and never, never in all his life had the ardent alcohol seemed so welcome, so good, and so invigorating.

"You have this night done a thing that'll immortalize you," said the Kinchin-Grand, inspired with a sentiment of profound admiration for the daring feat which the Magsman had so triumphantly achieved and which had thus enabled him to escape from the strongest prison in all England.

"Well, I don't think it was a bad night's work, young fellow," returned the Magsman. "But who are your two friends, that I may thank them for the service they have

done in helping you in this matter? — for it was too dark on the leads to catch a glimpse of their features, and here it's darker still."

"I suppose that the names of Dick the Tramper and Miles the Buzgloak ain't unbeknown to you, Mr. Warren?" said the Kinchin-Grand with a chuckling laugh.

"I should rather think not!" exclaimed the Magsman, evidently delighted to be in such good company. "Tip us your mawley, Dick, my boy; now, Miles, give us your hand; and thank you both kindly for this night's assistance."

"It was easy work so far as we was concerned, after all," observed the Tramper, who spoke in a thick, husky tone, which was natural to him.

"And had it been ten times as difficult, we'd have done it for you, old feller," added Miles the Buzgloak.

"Lord bless ye! what a lark it was!" exclaimed the Kinchin-Grand, having drained the flask which he had passed around. "Fust, when we double-knocked at the door, crack went a pitch plaster over the mouth of the old woman as opened it, and she was pinioned in a jiffy. Then we stayed as still as death, and up comed a tall genelman, whom we sarved just the same. Then comed the boy, and smack goes the burgundy plaster again. Last of all, old Shrubsole makes his appearance —"

"Well, we mustn't stay chattering here," interrupted the Magsman, somewhat impatiently. "Where's Lizzie Marks?"

"Keeping guard on the people of the house down in the kitchen," replied the precocious captain of the Kinchin-Prigs. "We carried 'em all down there, and took off the pitch plasters from the three as had 'em dabbed on their faces; and your missus is a-keepin' them quiet with loaded pistols. But come along down-stairs, and we'll call her up."

The villains accordingly descended the several flights leading to the passage communicating with the front door; and the Kinchin-Grand hurried down into the lower regions to communicate to the Gallows' Widow the welcome intelligence of her flash man's safety. But she had already heard the sounds of the heavy footsteps on the stairs; and rushing from the kitchen, she hastily gave the pistols to the Kinchin-Grand, whom she met on her way, and a

moment afterward was hugging the Magsman with the most unfeigned sincerity.

When this transport of feeling was over, — a feeling which even that criminal and degraded woman could experience as well as the duchess clothed in silks and satins, — the Gallows' Widow recovered all her wonted calmness and self-possession.

"You must go out alone first; we'll follow in an hour," she said. "Yes, you must have a full hour," she continued, in a low and rapid whisper, "before we leave this house or allow the people in it a chance of freeing themselves from the cords that bind them. Here, I have provided you a large slouched hat, a cloak, and a thick shawl-handkerchief to tie around your neck."

And, as she thus spoke, the woman took the various articles enumerated from a bag which in the meantime had been lying on the floor in the passage.

The Magsman speedily put on the disguise so considerably provided; then, having taken leave of Dick the Trumper and Miles the Buzgloak, and having whispered two or three words in the ears of the Gallows' Widow, he issued from the house.

CHAPTER V

THE MILLINER AND THE PRINCE

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of the day which followed the memorable night of Joe Warren's escape from Newgate; and Mrs. Brace was seated alone in her comfortable parlour, when Harriet entered to announce Mr. Harley.

The Prince of Wales advanced into the room, the door of which was immediately closed behind him; and the milliner rose to welcome his Royal Highness with her sweetest smiles.

"My dear friend," he said, kissing her buxom cheeks, for she was looking most invitingly handsome, "you must really have fancied that I had forgotten you. I have not seen you since that unfortunate Sunday evening, nearly three weeks ago, when we both of us experienced so cruel a shock —"

"And, to speak candidly," interrupted Mrs. Brace, a blush mantling upon her countenance, "I was fearful that you were too much disgusted on that occasion ever to cross my threshold again."

"What! have you no better opinion of my friendship?" exclaimed the prince, passing his arm around the milliner's waist and drawing her toward him. Then, having again kissed her, he made her resume her seat; and, placing himself near her, he observed, "It was an unfortunate affair, for which you were in no way to blame. Will you not believe me when I assure you it was very far from being on that account that I have not called for a fortnight and upwards? The truth is, I am worried to death with this marriage scheme which my august father and his Ministers have got up for me, and which I dare say you have seen announced

in the papers. Besides, my creditors are pressing me on all sides. They dun, threaten me with exposure, leave insolent messages at Carlton House, write the most insulting letters to my private secretary — ”

“ Ah! my dear prince, how I wish that I was wealthy enough to assist you! ” exclaimed Mrs. Brace.

“ I know that you possess the most generous heart, Fanny, and therefore you can feel for me, ” said his Royal Highness. “ But, as I was telling you, these sources of vexation have made me ill, and I have scarcely been out-of-doors since I saw you last. This explanation will convince you that no unfriendly motive kept me away. I have often thought of you, especially when I read in the paper that the miserable man Joseph Warren was in custody. ”

“ Ah! then you recognized the identity of that prisoner — with — my — ”

And the handsome milliner stopped, blushed deeply, and held down her head.

“ Why should you make allusions that distress you, Fanny? ” demanded the prince. “ Yes, I knew immediately that the Joseph Warren who was thus arrested must be the same individual who — But no matter; and I suppose that you are aware of the marvellous escape which he achieved last night? ”

“ I am not only aware of it, ” responded the milliner, “ but I was forced, yes, absolutely forced, to assist him in the enterprise, ” she added, in a low and mournful tone.

“ You! ” ejaculated the prince, in unfeigned astonishment.

“ Yes, indeed, ” she immediately replied. “ You of course understand that I am completely in his power, and when a woman who is connected with him called upon me and represented how my services could be rendered available, I was compelled to submit to an imperious necessity. I should not tell you all this, but you are so intimately acquainted with my affairs and my position, that it were ridiculous to conceal anything from you. ”

“ I should be sorry if you did, Fanny, ” said the prince, assuming his kindest tone, but only because there was a certain matter in which he required the milliner’s assistance. Otherwise the selfishness of his disposition would have rendered him impatient of the turn which the conversation

had taken. "Proceed, tell me all that has occurred, so far as you were concerned."

"I shall not detain your attention on that point many minutes," answered Mrs. Brace, who, on her side, was merely volunteering these explanations in order to ascertain how far the sympathies of the prince would extend in her favour, for the lapse of long years had not completely annihilated the affection which she had once borne him. "You must know," she continued, "that I yesterday paid a visit to that frightful prison of Newgate. The object of this proceeding was to supply the wretched man with the means of escape. Had any of his known friends sought an interview with him, they would have been so closely watched as to render it impossible to slip even a file into his hand, much less a packet of some size; whereas I, being looked upon as a stranger whom curiosity had led to visit the gaol, found that opportunity with comparative ease. In the packet which I was thus enabled to convey to him there was a plan of Newgate, drawn up by some of his confederates outside the walls who were evidently full well acquainted with the interior. This plan showed him how his own cell was situated, how many rooms there were above him, and how he must work through the ceiling of each in order to arrive at the leads. The newspapers have told you the rest."

"Yes, and the whole thing was most admirably managed, truly," observed the prince. "The idea of his accomplices getting into the house adjoining the prison, overpowering and binding the inmates, then ascending to the roof, whence they alighted on the top of Newgate, in order to cut away the lead, — all this, I say, was excellent and showed a spirit of combination and enterprise worthy of a better cause. But have you any idea of what has become of the villain?"

"None, and now let us cease to allude to him," said Mrs. Brace.

"Be it so, my dear Fanny," rejoined the prince; "for I have many things to talk to you about. In the first place, have you seen Lord Florimel? For you have not, I hope, forgotten the little scheme which we settled together the last time I was here, and the object of which was to cure him of his sickly sentimentalism."

"I saw him very recently," answered Mrs. Brace, a deep

blush again mantling her countenance, but for a reason far different from that which had previously called it up.

"And you have succeeded?" said the prince. "Ah! that telltale glow upon your plump cheeks, Fanny —"

"No, I did not succeed," interrupted the milliner. "I lavished all my arts and wiles upon the object in view, and at the moment when I was about to triumph and he to succumb, a most unexpected intrusion dissolved the spell which I had cast upon him, and he escaped me."

"And you have not seen him since?" inquired the prince.

"No. But he shall not escape me thus," added the milliner. "I have a thousand stratagems as yet unexhausted, and which I know well how to adopt in such a case," she observed, a wanton smile playing upon her moist lips and showing her brilliant teeth.

"Would that you were kind and amiable enough to use one of them in my behalf!" exclaimed the prince, fixing upon her a look full of meaning.

"Ah! you have seen another *houri* who has smitten you," said Mrs. Brace, the wantonness of her smile now changing into archness, both irresistibly fascinating.

"You have conjectured the truth, Fanny," was the reply; "and your aid is needed to catch the wary and haughty, but beauteous bird, in an inextricable mesh."

"The affair is, then, a difficult one?" said Mrs. Brace, inquiringly.

"More difficult than any amour which I have ever yet undertaken," answered the prince; "inasmuch as the new object of my fancy is no young and inexperienced girl to be subdued by means of sophistry, promises, pledges, vows, and protestations; no woman of the middle class whom it is comparatively easy to dazzle with the splendour of my rank; no lady of easy virtue who values the title of the prince's mistress more than her own coronet."

"Then who, in Heaven's name, can she be?" inquired Mrs. Brace.

"A lady of high rank and most unimpeachable virtue," returned his Royal Highness; "a lady who has never furnished scandal with the slightest ground to assail her fair fame, and who, nevertheless, lives on terms of a singular and unaccountable nature with her husband. This husband is handsome, rich, elegant in manners, accomplished, generous,

and in every respect formed to render a young and beautiful wife happy. But rumour declares that they live apart, though under the same roof — ”

“ You allude to the Countess of Desborough! ” exclaimed Mrs. Brace, suddenly interrupting the description which the prince was giving her.

“ I do. But are you acquainted — ”

“ I have the honour of her ladyship’s patronage,” rejoined the milliner.

“ By heaven! this is fortunate,” ejaculated the prince, his countenance expressing the liveliest joy. “ Does the countess ever visit your establishment? ”

“ Seldom, and even then she merely stops in her carriage at the door to issue some order,” said Mrs. Brace. “ I usually attend her ladyship at her own mansion in Berkeley Square. Indeed, it is singular enough that I am to wait upon her the day after to-morrow at eleven o’clock in the morning.”

“ Oh, if your fertile brain could only devise some means of bringing that haughty woman to my arms, I would never, never cease to think of you with gratitude, the deepest gratitude, Fanny,” said the prince; and, as he thus spoke, he took Mrs. Brace’s plump, warm, white hand and pressed it tenderly.

“ First let me know upon what terms you are with her ladyship,” remarked the milliner. “ As a matter of course, you are acquainted with her; but does she suspect that you admire her? I am half-inclined to believe that you have expressed your feelings already in that quarter; and, being too precipitate, you have experienced a rebuff. Else wherefore do you denominate her proud and haughty? ”

“ You have guessed rightly, my dear friend,” said the prince. “ It was on the very day after that disagreeable Sunday evening to which we have already alluded, that I called at Desborough House in Berkeley Square, and I saw the countess alone. Although I had known her for some years, yet never before had she struck me as being so ravishingly beautiful. She dazzled, bewildered, fascinated me; and, unable to restrain my feelings, I cast myself at her feet. For a moment she yielded her hand to me, and I could see the fires of excitement flash from her eyes and the warm blushes glow upon her cheeks. But suddenly recovering herself, she assumed all the hauteur which would have be-

come her so much better had she adopted that proud attitude at once. I soothed her, and our conversation proceeded; on her part, it almost seemed to encourage me, and, worked up nearly to a pitch of frenzy, I caught her in my arms. Again she abandoned herself to me for a few moments and again did her eyes sparkle, and her cheeks glow with wanton blushes. But all in an instant she sprang from my embrace, uttered some words of reproach, and, ringing the bell, ordered my carriage to be summoned to the door, the menial of course believing that I myself must have expressed a wish to depart. But ere I left her, I was foolish enough to murmur some threat in her ears, and since that day I have not beheld her."

"Can you not read the enigma of her ladyship's conduct?" asked Mrs. Brace. "The explanation may be summed up in a few words. She is a woman of strong passions and stubborn virtue: her deeply seated principles triumphed over her consuming desires."

"Yes, it must be as you have represented, my dear friend," said the prince.

"And therefore it will be almost impossible to corrupt the Countess of Desborough," rejoined Mrs. Brace.

"What! have you no hope to give me, no stratagem to suggest, no scheme to propose?" exclaimed his Royal Highness. "Ah! is this your fertility in resources, Fanny?"

"I do not profess to work miracles," was the answer. "Give me the common clay, and I will undertake to mould it into the shape required; but if you place granite in my hands, it will resist all attempts to model it to a particular purpose."

"True!" ejaculated the prince. "And yet I am not disposed to abandon the enterprise on account of its difficulty. Look you here, Fanny," he continued, throwing a bank-note upon the table, "there are five hundred pounds. Poor as I am, I can spare that amount for such an object. Remember, I do not mean to insult you by attributing mercenary motives to the assistance which you so often render me; but I know that you have heavy expenses to meet in various ways, and perhaps that amount will sharpen your wits in my behalf on the present occasion."

"Well, I suppose that I must see what I can do in the matter," said Mrs. Brace. "Leave me to devise some project to smooth your path to the envied bower of the fair lady.

After all, she is not ice, but flesh and blood, ay, and the blood is warm, too, that flows in her veins. But have you forgotten your Octavia? Does she no longer engage your thoughts, even for a single moment? ”

“ I love and adore her with a lasting passion,” exclaimed the prince; “ and I shall write to her in a day or two to request her to meet me here. She believes that I am out of town for the present. But my affection for that beauteous girl is quite of a different nature from that which inspires me with regard to the Countess of Desborough. You say that you will see her ladyship the day after to-morrow in the forenoon? Well, in the evening I shall do myself the pleasure of visiting you again. Meantime farewell, dear Fanny.”

And, having embraced the handsome milliner, his Royal Highness took his departure.

CHAPTER VI

TWO SPECIMENS OF THE "NEW LIGHTS"

At the same time that the preceding dialogue was taking place in Pall Mall, a scene of scarcely a less interesting character was in progress at Mr. Meagles's lodgings in Jermyn Street.

Shortly after eight o'clock on this particular evening, Lady Letitia Lade, habited in her Amazonian garb, arrived at her friend's abode, and was immediately conducted by the agile Wasp to the parlour where his master was discussing a cigar and a bottle of Madeira.

"My dearest Letitia," exclaimed Meagles, bounding from his chair to receive and welcome the huntress, "I am so delighted you are come. There is such a treat in store for you!"

"The canting parson, I'll be bound," said the Amazon, laying aside her hat and arranging her glossy hair, as it showered in a thousand luxuriant ringlets over her well-formed shoulders.

"Exactly so," cried Meagles. "But sit down, take a glass of Madeira, light your cigarette, and I shall just have time to tell you all about it before he comes."

The beautiful woman complied with the various invitations to which Meagles gave such rapid utterance; and, lolling back in the chair while she stretched out her symmetrical legs toward the fender, she gave him a look to intimate that she was all attention.

"By the bye," said Meagles, "you have heard of Joe Warren's marvellous escape?"

"The whole town is ringing with it," responded the Amazon. "He is a perfect rival of Jack Sheppard. But let us hear about the New Light," she added, laughing.

"So you shall," returned Meagles. "This morning, at about ten o'clock, I wanted to go into the City to pay some money to a person of whom I bought a horse yesterday, and my gig was at the door, when, as I was going down-stairs, I overtook my sanctimonious neighbour, Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby.

"A fine morning, reverend sir,' I observed.

"Yes, under the divine blessing,' he observed; and then he turned around and stared at me very hard indeed. 'I presume,' he continued, after a long silence and an equally protracted survey, 'that you are the fleshpot of Egypt who dwelleth on the first floor of this tabernacle.'

"I acknowledged, without hesitation, that I was the fleshpot alluded to; and although I had a great mind to knock him down for his impudence, I restrained myself because such a proceeding on my part would only have spoiled the fun that you and I had determined to have with him.

"Alas! alas!' he murmured, groaning heavily at the same time, and rolling his eyes in an awful fashion, 'is it possible that such a comely gentleman as you are can be a prey to all the sinful lusts of the flesh?'

"Really, sir,' said I, 'I am at a loss to understand your meaning;' and I was getting very savage.

"Whose chariot of the Philistines is that at the door?' he demanded, suddenly, and without taking any notice of my observation.

"It is my gig,' I said; 'but as for its being a chariot, or belonging to the Philistines, that is quite another part of the business.'

"Which way is the man of wrath going?' inquired Mr. Sneaksby.

"If you mean me, I am going into the City,' was my answer.

"I will accompany the ungodly one,' said the reverend gentleman; 'he shall put me down at the gates of Salem, that the portals thereof may delight his eyes, and invite him some day to enter.'

"And, without any more ado, Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby clambered up into the gig, covered his legs with my spare cloak, and made himself as comfortable as possible. So away we drove; and all along the Strand and Fleet Street the reverend gentleman regaled me with a discourse on the

vanity of every possible thing in this world that he could think of. At last, when we reached the commencement of Cheapside, he desired me to take him a little way up St. Martin's le Grand; and, in compliance with his wishes, I stopped at the door of a large chapel, on the front of which the word 'Salem' was cut in large letters. Two sleek-looking men, dressed in black, and who were standing at the entrance with faces as demure as if they were mutes, came forward and assisted the holy man to alight; and Mr. Sneaksby, without uttering a word of thanks for the ride he had enjoyed, asked me if I would not 'tarry and hear the soul-refreshing discourse' he was about to deliver. I expressed the regret I felt at my inability to accept his kind invitation; but I said that if he would honour me with his company for an hour in the evening, in my own apartments, I should be charmed to listen to his edifying and instructive conversation. He took it quite seriously, seemed to have formed a much better opinion of me than at first, and promised to look in at half-past eight o'clock. It is that now," added Tim, consulting his watch.

Scarcely had these last words fallen from the lips of Meagles, when slow and measured steps were heard descending the stairs, as if a funeral procession were coming down.

"This is the parson," whispered Meagles, chuckling in anticipation of glorious fun.

"But he is bringing somebody with him," observed the Amazon, in a similarly subdued tone.

"The more the merrier, if they're all like himself," responded Meagles. "Hush!"

Three measured and solid knocks were given at the room door, as if a ghost were about to enter.

"Come in!" exclaimed Meagles, instantly putting on a demure aspect, a proceeding in which he was imitated by the beautiful huntress, at least so far as she could induce her lovely, laughing, joyous features to assume a serious expression.

The door was thrown wide open, and the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby entered the apartment, with slow and sanctimonious face, followed by one of the sleek-looking men whom Tim Meagles had seen at the door of Salem Chapel.

But while these two pious individuals are settling themselves in the chairs which Meagles hastens to place near the

table for their accommodation, we will just say a word respecting their external appearance.

The Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby was a man of about five and forty years of age. The crown of his head was bald, but dark frizzy hair stood out in a bunch, on each side, between the temple and the ear. Behind, it was cut very short indeed, and lay quite flat and straight. His countenance was thin, pale, and somewhat of the hatchet description; but it would not have been disagreeable were it not for the settled expression of sanctimonious gloom and melancholy demureness which it wore. For cant was written in every lineament and on every feature as plainly as the word may be read on this page; cant was seen in the rolling of the eyes, the gradual elevation and depression of the brows, the pursing-up of the lips, the elongation of the chin, the slow and studied movements of the head. Yes, and cant, too, was recognized in the low white cravat that encircled the long, scraggy neck, the large shirt-frill, the clerical cut of the black coat and waistcoat with stand-up collars, and the knee-breeches, bluish black cotton stockings, and the great shoes with silver buckles. In person Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby was tall, thin, and slightly inclined to a stoop; and were it not for the measured pace at which he was accustomed to walk, his gait would have been shambling and awkward to a degree.

The individual who accompanied him was dressed in precisely the same manner; but in person he was very different. Short, thick-set, stout, and with a large, round, rubicund countenance, he presented a somewhat sleek, oily, and comfortable appearance in comparison with his friend, save that the habitual assumption of a demure expression of features would have led a stranger to believe that a naturally jovial and contented disposition had been marred and rendered wretched by some sudden affliction which had lingered ever since in the shape of a deeply seated and unappeasable woe. In a word, he looked like a jolly landlord fond of good ale, who, having drunk himself into insolvency, was compelled to adopt the profession of undertaker's mute and moisten his food with nothing better than water. Not that such was really the case in the present instance; but such, we say, was the impression his aspect would have made upon the mind of any one who saw him for the first time.

Scarcely had Mr. Sneaksby and his friend taken their seats, when their looks fell simultaneously upon Lady Lade, who was surveying them from the corner of her laughing eyes, and gently puffing the cigarette with the lips which could not altogether suppress a smile.

The Reverend Mr. Sneaksby seemed petrified with sudden astonishment, and his friend appeared precisely in the same predicament. For upwards of a minute did they gaze, open-mouthed, upon the lovely creature lounging with graceful negligence in her chair. At the first glance they fancied it was a young and dandified man, with his hair dressed in a feminine style; but as their looks wandered over the beautiful white forehead with its transparent tracery of azure veins faintly marked, — the profile too delicate for the male sex, — the brightness of the rich moist coral lips, the total absence of beard and whisker, the fairness of the complexion, and the glossy silkiness of that raven hair, — as their eyes, we say, embraced all these fascinating details, one after another, they began to entertain sore misgivings; and when their looks settled upon the exuberant and swelling contours of the full bosom over which the riding-surtout fitted with such shapely tightness, developing rather than concealing those feminine charms of which the Amazon possessed such a voluptuous abundance, their faces gradually elongated to a degree presenting the most ludicrous aspect of woe-begone sanctimoniousness and hypocritical misery.

"Nathaniel Sneaksby," said the short gentleman, at length recovering the power of speech, and raising his eyes and lifting his hands as if he were going off in a fit, "know ye aught of that carnal creature?"

"Verily, my dearly beloved Ichabod Paxwax, she seemeth to me like the woman of Babylon," responded the reverend gentleman, imitating his friend in respect to the elevation of the eyes and hands.

Thereupon both Tim Meagles and the huntress burst into a hearty laugh; for, so far from being offended at the observations just made, they had expected something of the kind and were highly amused at what they did hear.

"Brother Sneaksby, let us depart hence," said the gentleman whose name appeared to be Ichabod Paxwax; "for I fear that we have fallen in with the ungodly."

"It is precisely for that reason we must stay and do our

holy behest," returned the reverend minister. "Peradventure we may be enabled, by our savoury discourse, to render that lost one sensible of her evil ways; for she is comely to look upon, and it were a sorrow and a shame to abandon her to the vanities by which she is encompassed round about."

"We will stay, then," said Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, with whom Mr. Sneaksby's will was evidently law.

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed Meagles, "if you are really desirous that your presence should work salutary effects with regard to myself and my fair companion, you will accept such humble hospitality as I can offer you. There's port, sherry, and Madeira upon the table, and at ten o'clock there's roast turkey, chine, mashed potatoes, and so on."

"Fleshpots!" exclaimed the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby, shaking his head solemnly, but unable to prevent his lips from smacking slightly, for his nose had caught the rich odour which came up from the kitchen as he was ere now descending the stairs.

"Vanities!" murmured Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, his own lips watering amazingly and a hungry sensation coming over him.

"Yet, verily, for the stomach's sake must we do this," continued Mr. Sneaksby, filling a glass with Madeira.

"Yea, even so," added Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, pouring himself out a bumper of port.

"Your names, gentlemen," said Meagles, "we know already. But you are not yet acquainted with my fair companion, whose fancy it is on occasions to wear a riding-dress. Allow me to introduce you to Lady Letitia Lade, wife of Sir John Lade, one of the richest baronets in England."

The announcement of the Amazon's rank and wealthy alliance produced a sudden and startling effect upon the two pious gentlemen. They each made a terrible grimace and looked awfully confused as the coarse allusions in which they had indulged flashed to their minds; and then they exchanged glances which said, as eloquently as ever eyes yet spoke, "Brother Sneaksby, what a fool you made of yourself!" "Brother Paxwax, what an ass you are!"

Thus is it ever with religious hypocrites. They will heap their cowardly abuse and aim their malignant shafts at a plain Mrs. Smith or a simple Mrs. Jones whom they behold

or suspect to be in an equivocal situation: but let the offending woman prove to be a lady of title and fortune, and the canting humbugs close their eyes at once to all her faults.

"Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen," the Amazon observed, after enjoying their confusion for nearly a minute, during which they fidgeted upon their chairs, exchanged glances ludicrously doleful, and threw furtive looks upon the lady whom they feared to have mortally offended. "I am not at all vexed at the little remarks which you thought fit to make. I am sure you were only acting conscientiously. Come, I will drink success to Salem!"

"Success to Salem!" ejaculated Meagles, filling his glass.

"Of a surety I see no harm in drinking a pious toast," observed Mr. Sneaksby, to whom Mr. Paxwax had cast a look of anxious inquiry.

"Be it so," murmured the latter gentleman; and the glasses were all drained in a moment.

"I now propose the health of our respected and esteemed friend, the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby," said Meagles; "and in order to do justice to the same, I further propose that we drink it in tumblers and not in paltry wine-glasses."

"I cordially agree," said the Amazon.

"Amen," murmured Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, having received a sign of approval from his spiritual chief; whereupon he filled a tumbler to the brim with the fruity old port.

Meagles, the Amazon, and Mr. Paxwax, then imbibed their deep draughts to the honour of Mr. Sneaksby, who sat bolt upright in his chair, endeavouring to screw his countenance into a complacent smile. When the ceremony was over, the reverend gentleman filled his tumbler almost to overflowing; and rising in a slow and solemn manner, he delivered the following address, with that peculiar nasal twang and chanting tone which had become habitual to him:

"Christian friends, my heart boundeth like a young roe on the hilltops at the honour ye have done me. For, alas! I am not ignorant of my own unworthiness, and how sinful a vessel I am. But, obedient to that call which so mysteriously prompted me to found the sect of New Lights, each member paying threepence a week to the general fund, a penny a week for Salem, and as much more as he chooses to give, — obedient to that call, I say, I have come before the world as the originator of a system which is calculated to

reconcile all conflicting opinions by proclaiming unceasing hostility to those who refuse to join us. For we are a sect militant, and can tolerate no doctrines or sentiments save the ones which we profess. On this broad basis is our institution established; and most savoury and soul-refreshing is the consciousness of aiding in so good a work. Alas! long was I a miserable, miserable sinner! For years was I a wicked linen-draper, having no thought but to make gains largely and expend them freely. My table groaned beneath the weight of luxuries; I was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. Never did my footsteps cross the threshold of church, chapel, or place of worship; and my vices, debaucheries, and immoralities were numerous as the hairs on my head. But, alas! vengeance came in the shape of one of those unclean swine whom men call sheriff's-officers; and my goods were all swept away; yea, vessels of gold and vessels of silver, and all the fleshpots wherein I did vainly rejoice, were borne off to the auction-rooms and vended to the ungodly. Then for many weary months I sat me down in a debtors' gaol; and no friends came to see me in the gate. Naked and in want, I was turned forth upon the wide world; and, not having a human being to extend a helping hand toward me nor a morsel to put between my lips, I reflected in the bitterness of my spirit on the course which I ought to pursue. Then was it that a light dawned in upon my soul, I saw the error of my ways, I obeyed the call which at that moment I received; I set up my staff in an open place and addressed the multitude, and on that day the sect of New Lights sprang into existence. Such, dear Christian friends, is the outline of my career. My beloved brother in the good work, the esteemed and revered Ichabod Paxwax, who sitteth amongst us even now, was one of my earliest adherents. His life hath been checkered likewise; but our eyes are open to the vanities of this world, and we are faithfully performing the mission for which we were destined and to perfect us for which we were so sorely chastened. Oh, my Christian brother Meagles, oh, my Christian sister Letitia Lade, arise, gird up your loins, repent, heap ashes upon your head, clothe yourselves in sackcloth, put gold and silver into your pockets and come to Salem, and ye shall be numbered amongst us, yea, even amongst the elect!"

As Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby uttered these last words, with

awful contortions of the countenance, rolling of the eyes, and upraising of the arms, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax thought it only decent and becoming on his part to get up a little byplay in the form of a gentle whimpering; while Tim Meagles and the Amazon experienced the utmost difficulty to restrain themselves from bursting into violent peals of laughter.

The reverend gentleman, having brought his discourse to a conclusion, drained his tumbler and sat down, evidently well satisfied with the eloquence he had displayed and the impression he fancied that he had made.

"In the name of her ladyship and on my own account," observed Meagles, assuming a very solemn demeanour, "I can only say that we shall certainly visit Salem next Sunday, and that we shall contribute our mite to so good a cause as that which you have propounded to us. For the present we can do nothing better than drink, in brimming tumblers, the health of our other new and esteemed friend, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax."

The face of the little gentleman, which had already acquired an additional rubicundity from the wine he had drunk, now became absolutely purple through excitement; and the toast having been duly honoured, he responded to the same in the following terms:

"Dear Brother Sneaksby and Christian friends, I thank you kindly. I'm a man of few words, but very capacious thoughts. My reverend leader in the good cause has given you a sketch of his life. I'll give you mine. Inscrutable decrees made me adopt the cheesemongering and bacon line. Like Brother Sneaksby, I made money rapidly — but spent it faster still. I mean I got into debt. My extravagance was wonderful; and I am not ashamed now, because I glory in the present when compared with the past, — I am not ashamed now, I say, to confess that for a matter of twelve years I went to bed drunk every night of my life. Liquor was as necessary to me as victuals, or more so. Well, this couldn't last, and it didn't. The Philistines put executions into my house, the Ammonites took me to gaol. I was like Lazarus, but even worse; for I had no rich man's crumbs to eat. Like Brother Sneaksby again, I was turned adrift naked and in want. As I passed the tavern and ale-houses, I would have given my soul for a draught of strong beer; I was sick unto death for a pint of ale. But I could obtain

none. Being sore athirst, I entered the famous inn where I was wont to expend my gold. I craved credit for some drink, but the waiter thrust me forth into the street. I anathematized him in the bitterness of my spirit; and I denounced the tavern as a whitened sepulchre. Thus was my soul relieved of a part of the load that lay upon it. But still the thirst was torturing me; and I was fain to seek the pump to refresh my burning tongue. Then, as I drank the cold water which my stomach loathed, I felt like Brother Sneaksby again — that I had a call. I heard of the New Lights; I repaired to Salem, and this revered gentleman at once took me to his home, and set steaks and bottled porter before me. Then I knew that a blessing attended upon the sect which he had founded; and I unhesitatingly joined it. Oh, my dear Mr. Meagles, my Christian sister, Lady Letitia Lade, with these striking examples before your eyes, can you hesitate to come amongst us? Most welcome will ye be, chosen vessels will ye prove, and the gold and silver which ye have promised to give unto Salem will help to redeem other lost creatures, even as such a miserable sinner as Ichabod Paxwax has been brought to redemption!"

With this eloquent and touching peroration, the pious gentleman drained his tumbler and sat down.

Meagles made a suitable response, and ended by proposing the health of Lady Lade. Again were the tumblers filled and emptied; and then the Amazon, having returned thanks, insisted that a similar compliment should be paid to her friend Meagles. The more they drank, the less hesitation did the pious gentlemen exhibit in drinking deeper draughts; and what with the toasts already enumerated, and others subsequently proposed and honoured, both Mr. Sneaksby and Mr. Paxwax were in a very comfortable condition indeed by the time Mrs. Pigglesberry and Wasp served up the promised banquet.

The landlady seemed highly delighted to find her second-floor lodger on such excellent terms with the occupant of her first story; and Wasp appeared literally bursting with the mischievous propensities to which he did not, however, dare give vent in the presence of his master. One little freak he did perform, all the same; and this was to tread with all his weight and force upon Mr. Ichabod Paxwax's toes, an incident for which he apologized with an appearance of the

utmost sincerity, and which made that pious gentleman wriggle and twist for some moments in excruciating torture.

At length the turkey, the chine, and the mashed potatoes, flanked by foaming tankards of brown stout and sparkling ale, were duly spread upon the hospitable board; and Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby contrived to place himself close to the Amazon, on whose charms his eyes had been dwelling for the previous half-hour with a gloating earnestness that was only subdued by the vacancy of inebriety.

"Won't you ask a blessing, Brother Sneaksby?" said Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, his eyes watering with the pain so recently inflicted upon his corn, and his mouth watering likewise, but at the odour of the turkey.

"Hic — ay — verily, I was ob—liv—livious," responded the reverend gentleman; and, joining his hands, he muttered something which was so interspersed with "hics" that it was perfectly unintelligible.

Mr. Paxwax, however, seemed satisfied; and moaned forth a guttural "Amen" at the conclusion.

Meagles and the Amazon exchanged significant glances from time to time, testifying to each other how intensely they enjoyed the evening's proceedings; and the mischievous pair kept filling the pious gentlemen's glasses the moment they were emptied.

"Brother Sneaksby," at length said the stout and red-faced saint, "I pre — he — hic — ssume that we shall now — hic — wind — hic — up, with sing — ing — ing the — hic — dox — ox — ology."

"Hold your tongue, Brother Paxwax — you're drunk!" exclaimed the reverend minister of Salem Chapel, who at that moment had begun to press his knee gently against the Amazon's.

"Drunk! — me drunk!" moaned the astounded Ichabod, falling back in his chair and lifting his hands in horrified amazement. "Brother Sne — eaks — hicby — did you mean that for me?"

"To be sure I did — hic," responded the reverend gentleman, darting a savage glance at his friend. "Drunk — beastly drunk, I say. Verily, Ich — hic — abod, thou hast likened thyself unto filthy swine!"

For a few seconds Mr. Paxwax gazed on his leader with the vacant stare of stupid astonishment; then, all on a

sudden giving vent to his feelings in a hollow moan, he fell flat upon the floor.

"Dead drunk!" exclaimed Meagles; and Wasp being summoned to assist, the inebriated New Light was borne up-stairs to his pious friend's chamber, where he was undressed and put to bed in a most hopeless state of intoxication.

But scarcely had the door closed behind Meagles and Wasp, as they carried Mr. Ichabod Paxwax away between them, when the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby, apparently regardless of his companion's fate, turned toward Lady Letitia Lade; and, assuming as tender an expression as the peculiar configuration of his countenance and his own obfuscated ideas would permit, he said, "Yea, verily, sweet woman, thou art comely to — hic — look upon. But doth not that tight-fitting coat compress — ess thy form — hic — somewhat inconveniently?"

"Oh, not in the least, I can assure you," exclaimed the mischievous Amazon, allowing him to press his knee more closely still against her own, and bending upon him a look of encouragement.

"Of a surety I am surprised that thou art easy in such an attire," continued Mr. Sneaksby, leaning forward. "Methought it must be tight and even painful here."

And, as he spoke, he passed his arm around the Amazon's waist; then, flattering himself that, as she only smiled gaily with her red lips and her wicked eyes, she was far from offended at his proceeding, he prepared to refresh himself with the luxury of a kiss.

But at the same moment the huntress raised her hand and dealt him such a smart and ringing box on the ears, that the pious gentleman was knocked clean off his chair and levelled as completely with the floor as his friend Ichabod had been, though from another cause, before him.

"Holloa! what's the matter?" exclaimed Meagles, returning to the room at the instant.

"Only the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby making love to me," responded the Amazon, almost suffocating with the hilarious laughter in which she now indulged.

Meagles comprehended what had passed; and throwing himself on a seat, he gave way to an equally hearty burst of merriment.

Slowly and demurely did the minister of Salem Chapel rise from the carpet; and when he had gained his legs, his body swayed backward and forward for several moments before he could even steady himself by leaning on the back of his chair. First he gazed in a dull and vacant manner at Meagles, then his eyes settled in a similarly meaningless fashion upon Lady Letitia Lade; and then he burst out into a horse-laugh as the best means of covering his confusion.

"Come, resume your seat, reverend sir," said the Amazon, with a good-humoured smile; "and we shall be very excellent friends so long as you don't attempt to make love to me. Remember," she added, archly, "I am a carnal creature, a woman of Babylon, and you must not render me worse."

Mr. Sneaksby looked particularly foolish, the more so because he was particularly drunk; but, cheered by the good-natured manner in which Meagles now pressed him to wind up with a glass of whiskey and water, he accepted the invitation and poured the steaming punch down his throat as if it were anything rather than alcohol.

Presently an oath slipped from his tongue, then his conversation grew slightly loose and indecorous, and, having vociferated a bacchanalian song by way of concluding the evening's entertainment, he staggered off to bed, with the emphatic declaration that "he'd be damned if he wouldn't denounce that infernal drunken scoundrel Paxwax next Sunday, from the pulpit of Salem Chapel."

CHAPTER VII

THE OLD BAILEY

AT nine o'clock on the morning following the incidents just related, Martin and Ramsey were ushered by Soper into the dock of the criminal tribunal in the Old Bailey.

The weather was fine and frosty, and the sunbeams, illuminating the crisp, fresh air, penetrated into the court, as if by playing on the countenances of the accused they could diminish the ghastliness of their aspect.

The grand jury had already returned true bills of indictment against the prisoners. The petty jury had been sworn and were located in their box; the recorder was seated behind his little desk upon the bench, at one end of which a couple of aldermen were lounging idly and conversing upon the grand entertainment given by the lord mayor on the previous day; and the barristers were untying their bundles of briefs (sham ones in many instances) on the table around which they were placed.

The gallery and the body of the hall were crowded; for the circumstances connected with the case had produced a deep sensation, and many elegantly dressed ladies were present to hear the proceedings.

The two persons chiefly interested in the trial that was about to ensue were care-worn, woe-begone, and overwhelmed with confusion. The train of thoughts that swept through their minds as they took their stand in the fatal dock recalled to their remembrance the happy days of innocence which were gone, never to be renewed; and, now that it was too late, bitterly, bitterly did they curse the folly, the insanity, the madness which had hurried them into those ways of crime whence there was no retreating.

The usher proclaimed silence in the court, the witnesses

were ordered to withdraw, and the prisoners were called upon to plead. To this demand Martin responded, "Not guilty," in a faint and scarcely audible tone; but Ramsey, summoning all his courage to his aid by a desperate effort, gave the same reply in a firmer and louder voice.

The counsel for the prosecution then rose and addressed the jury.

He began by explaining that there were two separate indictments against the prisoners at the bar. The first charged them with forging certain powers of attorney, and with passing spurious coin into the circulation of this realm; the second accused them of conspiring to kidnap, carry off, and keep in confinement Sir Richard Stamford, baronet. It was on the former indictment that they were now charged; and on the allegations set forth therein were they to take their trial. The learned counsel went on to state the case at considerable length; but as we shall detail the evidence adduced in support of the prosecution, it is unnecessary to give the opening speech.

Sir Richard Stamford was first summoned to the witness-box, which he entered with the air of a man determined to perform a painful duty; for, in the generosity of his heart, he even pitied the two wretches who had worked such deplorable and wholesale mischief against him. His appearance was the signal for a murmur of surprise and sympathy throughout the hall: surprise at the great resemblance which he bore to the Prince of Wales, and sympathy on account of the misfortunes which he had endured.

Martin hung down his head through shame; and Ramsey, having darted one furtive glance at the man whom he had so deeply injured, never once looked again toward the witness-box during the hour and a half that it was occupied by the baronet.

Sir Richard Stamford, in answer to the leading questions put by the counsel for the prosecution, recited most of those particulars with which the reader is already acquainted.

The Buckinghamshire justice of the peace who was present, as just described, at Lady Stamford's death, was the second witness examined. A paper was put into his hand; and he declared it to be the depositions which he had taken down from the dying woman's lips. The contents went far to confirm Martin and Ramsey's guilt in **respect** of the misap-

appropriation of the funds of the bank, and likewise to prove her husband's innocence in that respect. With regard to the forgeries and the issue of spurious coin, the document said little, as Lady Stamford had never been made acquainted with those facts by her paramour Ramsey; but the paper set forth that when Sir Richard accused Ramsey of those crimes, on the memorable night at the manor, he did not attempt to deny them.

The next witness called was Mr. Peter Grumley, the police officer. He deposed to the capture of the prisoners effected in the manner already known to the readers; and on being shown a certain paper, he declared that he had discovered it in a cupboard when searching the house in Thacker's Court. This paper set forth that Sir Richard Stamford conveyed all his property to Martin and Ramsey for the benefit of the creditors of the bank; that he acknowledged to have committed certain frauds and forgeries, which he implored them to settle in order to rescue his name from infamy; that on those conditions he would depart to America, with the express understanding that he was never to return to England; and that five hundred a year were to be allowed him for the rest of his life by the aforesaid Martin and Ramsey. This paper, which was drawn up in the handwriting of Ramsey (as proved by another witness), was without date or signature, and was evidently the one which it was sought to coerce Sir Richard Stamford into signing when he was imprisoned in the dungeon.

Mr. Page was now summoned to the box, which he entered with a smirking, self-sufficient air; and, having complacently surveyed both judge and jury, he proceeded to answer the questions put to him by the counsel for the prosecution. He explained that, being entrapped into the power of certain villains, he was incarcerated in the same dungeon with Sir Richard Stamford, that they escaped thence, and that accident had thrown into his hand a document which had already been adduced in evidence at the police court. This was a letter addressed to "Joseph Warren at the Beggar's Staff, Horslydown;" and it was likewise proved (in the course of the trial) to be in Ramsey's handwriting.

The next witness examined on the present occasion was the cashier of the late banking establishment at Aylesbury. He proved the handwriting of the document found in the

house at Thacker's Court, and that of the letter addressed to Joseph Warren: it was Mr. Ramsey's. The cashier went on to show that Sir Richard Stamford never interfered with the business, and never overdrew his own private account. He perfectly well recollected the arrival of a box containing gold, or alleged to contain gold, about the commencement of the spring of the previous year (1794). The contents were three thousand guineas, or what he (the cashier) took to be guineas; and Mr. Martin himself mixed them up with several thousands of guineas previously in the safe. The whole was paid away in due course. He thought the box came from Coutts and Co., the London agents of the bank.

The next witness was a clerk in the Bank of England. This gentleman proved that extensive forgeries had been committed on that establishment: powers of attorney authorizing the sale of stock invested in the names of several persons had been acted upon by Mr. Martin, who was in the habit of receiving the dividends for that stock. These powers of attorney were forgeries. Mr. Martin had attended at the bank with a stock-broker to effect the sales and receive the proceeds.

Two or three witnesses were then called to prove that they had never signed their names to the powers of attorney just alluded to; nor had they in any way authorized the sale of the stock specified therein.

This closed the case for the prosecution; and a barrister, who had been retained for the purpose, entered upon the defence of the two prisoners. But, although a man of great talent, he could not grapple with the stubborn facts which had been adduced. The forgery, at all events, was completely made out; and the learned gentleman was compelled to do the best he could for his clients in the shape of sophistry, specious declamation, and impassioned appeal to the jury. At the conclusion of his speech, he called several witnesses to testify to the characters of the accused; and this course gave the prosecuting counsel the right of reply, — a privilege which is detestable in the estimation of all humane men, but which in political cases serves the purposes of despotic ministers and bloodthirsty attorneys-general most admirably.

The recorder summed up the evidence with firmness and impartiality. In fact, judges are nearly always honest and

dispassionate save in such instances as those to which we have alluded; and then, with but few exceptions, they are the rank and unblushing partisans of the government.

It was five o'clock in the evening of this memorable day when the jury retired to deliberate in their private room.

For upwards of half an hour they remained absent; and during this interval the prisoners exhibited a nervous anxiety which, guilty though they assuredly were, was piteous to behold. Martin's countenance was ghastly pale; and, as he was advanced in years, the spectacle which he presented to the view was one that might well engender sympathy. Ramsey vainly endeavoured to appear firm; his quivering lip, the frequent spasmodic movements of his arms, the occasionally wild glaring of his eyes, the twitching of the flesh at the corners of his eyes, and the glances which he threw every other moment toward the door by which the jury had left their box, — all these were indications of a soul-crushing suspense and an appalling terror.

At length that door opened, and the jurymen returned into the court. Slowly and solemnly, like men who were about to take part in a funeral ceremony, did they resume their seats. All eyes were fixed upon them, a pin might have been heard to drop, the breath of every one present was suspended.

In the minute that elapsed between the reappearance of the jury and the delivery of their verdict by the foreman, the two prisoners lived whole centuries of indescribable anguish, passed through the bitterness of ten thousand deaths.

Scenes of the busy world without flashed through their minds; all the pleasures, delights, and enjoyments of existence swept across their imaginations with a pageantry the brilliancy of which was heightened a myriad times by the contrast which their own awful condition presented.

Could they be doomed to die? Oh, no, it was impossible! What earthly power could snatch them away from existence? What human hand dared grasp the fatal thunderbolts of immortal Jove to hurl at them?

It appeared a dream, a whirling, maddening, horrible dream, a frightful and appalling vision from which they would presently awake to the consciousness of its delusion and their own safety.

But ah! what is that dreadful word which has just stricken their ears?

"Guilty!" Oh, it is no dream, no vision: it is a fearful reality. They are awake, and they are there!

Yes, the jury have given in their verdict; and the recorder places the black cap upon his head.

The clerk of the court calls the prisoners by their names. He inquires of them whether they have any reason to allege why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon them.

Reasons! Yes, ten thousand reasons! For the one is an old man who has but a few years to live in the ordinary course of nature, and it would be shocking to deprive him of that short, that trifling, that poor, insignificant span; the other is young, in the prime of life, and with the vigorous constitution that promises half a century more of existence in this world. Oh, these facts suggest a myriad reasons wherefore they should not be doomed to die!

But their tongues cleave to the roofs of their mouths, they cannot utter a word, they cannot give vent to a single syllable; and yet they have so much to say!

An awful consternation is upon them: the lights in the court appear to burn blue, the faces that are turned from all sides toward the dock seem ghastly and hideous, the human beings by whom they are surrounded assume spectral shapes to their imagination, the jury look like twelve fiends, the very judge is the archdemon in their eyes!

Hark! what are those solemn words which now break upon the awful stillness that had followed the crier's proclamation for silence?

'Tis the death-sentence which the recorder is pronouncing.

But the prisoners cannot understand what he says: their brain is whirling fearfully, the lights are dancing before their eyes, spectral forms seem to be gathering in around them. Nevertheless, they can comprehend this much, — that they are doomed to be hanged by the neck until they are dead; and the judge winds up the barbarian sentence by invoking the Almighty to have mercy upon their souls!

The turnkey touches them upon the shoulder; they mechanically follow him away from the dock, and in a few minutes Martin is the tenant of one condemned cell, and Ramsey of another.

It being now past six o'clock, the recorder quitted the

court, to join the sheriffs, the ordinary, the governor of Newgate, and some of the barristers, at the dinner-table; and the common sergeant took his seat upon the bench.

Stephen Price (*alias* the Big Beggarman) and Briggs were then placed in the dock.

They were charged with having kidnapped and detained in unlawful custody Sir Richard Stamford and Mr. Page; and, the case being thoroughly proven against them, they were sentenced to transportation for fifteen years.

With this trial the proceedings of the session terminated.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DUCHESS AND THE COUNTESS

It was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, — and while Martin and Ramsey were in the presence of their judge, — that a lady alighted from a splendid equipage at the door of the Earl of Desborough's mansion in Berkeley Square. She was immediately ushered with great respect to one of the magnificent drawing-rooms belonging to that dwelling; and while she is waiting there until the countess makes her appearance, we will indulge in a few words descriptive of her personal charms.

And charming she assuredly was, although in the thirty-eighth year of her age. Nature had lavished all her choicest gifts upon her form; and, though her countenance habitually wore a smiling sweetness of expression, yet there was an air of voluptuousness about her, surrounding and enveloping her as with a halo, that engendered undefinable sensations in the breast of the beholder, as if it were from love that she had borrowed the impress of her witching beauty.

Her hair was of a rich auburn, which wantoned in a thousand glossy and shining ringlets upon her shoulders, and gave her so youthful an appearance that, when it was thus arranged, she seemed to have scarcely reached her thirtieth year. Her eyes were large and of a deep hazel hue, sometimes languishing and tender, at others lustrous with an overwhelming light; sometimes with love beaming in every glance, at others flashing with the natural but latent haughtiness of a proud disposition.

Her complexion was of the purest white, save where on each plump and well-rounded cheek it blushed into the rose's hue; and her lips, full but not thick, were of the brightest coral. Her teeth were small, beautifully white, and fault-

lessly even; and, when she laughed, it appeared as if they were musical pearls that thus sent forth a delicious, soft, and silvery sound.

Her figure was on a large scale, but admirably proportioned, the fulness of the bust setting off the wasplike symmetry of the waist; her arms were robust, but stainlessly white and exquisitely rounded, and the graceful majesty of her walk indicated the fine and well-modelled length of limb which imparted to her gait its classic elegance and statuesque dignity.

Such was Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, the idol of that sphere of fashion over which she presided with unquestioned sway, and from which she received all the blandishments of flattery and all the homage of worship and devotion.

Throwing herself upon a sofa with the ease and familiarity of one who knew and felt that she was in the abode of an intimate friend, the brilliant duchess waited until Lady Desborough made her appearance; and when the latter entered the room after a few minutes' delay, their greeting was reciprocally cordial.

"Dearest Georgiana," said the countess, "I am delighted to see you. It is an age since we last met."

"Nearly six months, Eleanor," responded the Duchess of Devonshire. "My tour in Scotland has been protracted beyond my original expectations; but at length, behold me once more in happy London. I only returned with his Grace last evening, and my first visit is paid to you."

"Your friendship, dear Georgiana, is most soothing and consolatory to me," said the Countess of Desborough, an involuntary sigh escaping her bosom.

"Heavens! you are unhappy," exclaimed the Duchess of Devonshire, taking Eleanor's hand and pressing it affectionately. "Tell me, my beloved friend, what is the matter with you? Wherefore do you sigh?"

"Oh, it is nothing, nothing, I can assure you," answered the countess, hastily. "But I have been somewhat indisposed to-day, — a partial headache —"

"My dearest Eleanor, this excuse would pass current with a mere acquaintance," interrupted her Grace, "but not with a sincere, a very sincere friend. Recollect, Eleanor, we have known each other since our childhood, I might almost say, notwithstanding there is a difference of ten years between

my age and yours. Therefore, as an elder sister do I speak to you, for as a sister I love you, Eleanor."

"How can I sufficiently testify my gratitude for these generous expressions?" exclaimed the Countess of Desborough.

"By making me the confidant of your secret sorrow," was the prompt answer; "for a secret sorrow am I assured that you cherish. But imagine not for an instant, Eleanor, that a base and contemptible feeling of curiosity urges me thus to address you. Intimate as I have been with you, devoted in our friendship as we are toward each other, this is the first time that I have ever ventured to touch upon so delicate a topic. Often and often have I beheld you pensive, thoughtful, melancholy, unhappy; and I have longed to throw my arms around your neck, and implore you to confide your sorrows to me, that I might sympathize and console. Six years have now passed since you became the Countess of Desborough, and I know that the alliance which you have formed has not ensured your felicity. Nay, this much is no secret with the world generally; but the cause is unsuspected, unknown, beyond all power of conjecture. To me, I confess, it is the greatest of mysteries; for the noble earl, your husband, appears to possess every qualification adapted to render your existence a paradise and win your best affections. Tell me, then, dearest Eleanor, tell your sincerest and most attached friend the source of your sorrow. Perhaps I may be enabled to counsel and advise; at all events, I am certain to sympathize with you and offer such consolation as it may be in my power to impart."

"The world, then, is aware that his lordship and myself dwell not together in the sweet harmony of matrimonial bliss?" said the Countess of Desborough, casting down her looks, while a deep carnation suffused her clear olive cheeks.

"Such is indeed the case, Eleanor," returned Georgiana. "But, understand me well, the world attributes no blame to you. Your reputation is unsullied; scandal has never dared to whisper a syllable against you."

"Oh, it would be cruel indeed if it were otherwise!" exclaimed Eleanor, with a degree of bitterness which surprised her friend. "But pray let us change the conversation, let us pass to some other topic."

"Have you no faith in friendship?" asked the Duchess

of Devonshire, in a gentle tone of reproach. "Can you not conceive that by unbosoming yourself to me, you will be consoled and comforted? Or do you fancy that the giddy whirl of pleasure and fashionable dissipation has rendered me so thoroughly heartless —"

"Oh, no, no!" interrupted the countess, shocked by the cruel suspicion thus implied. "I know that you are everything kind, generous, affectionate —"

"Then you will trust me? you will confide in me?" said Georgiana, her tone assuming the tenderness of the most unfeigned friendship. "You do not require from my lips the assurance that your secret, whatever it may be, will rest as a sacred deposit in my bosom, never, never to be revealed."

"I know not what to say!" exclaimed Eleanor, clasping her hands in a sudden paroxysm of anguish, while a tear rolled down each blushing cheek. "I am bewildered, Georgiana, I am uncertain how to act! Your kindness prompts me to unbosom myself without reserve; but, on the other hand, feelings which I cannot explain —"

"Oh, you are indeed unhappy, my sweet friend," interrupted her Grace; "and yet you hesitate to allow me the means of sympathizing with you! Eleanor, this is cruel, this is unjust, for you are well aware that since you were eight years old and I was eighteen, our attachment to each other has never been for a moment marred by a harsh word or a cold look."

"This is true, most true," murmured the Countess of Desborough; "and were I to make any one a confidant of the secret sorrow which, I admit, weighs upon my heart, that friend would be yourself."

"Is it possible that you can love another? that you hate your husband for that other's sake?" ejaculated the duchess, a sudden idea striking her.

"No, no," responded the Countess of Desborough; then, in an altered and far more solemn tone, she added, "Never yet have I felt what love is."

"You did not love the earl when you married him?" exclaimed Georgiana, profoundly surprised. "This, then, was at least a secret which you kept from me. But surely his conduct must have been such as to win your affections? Surely he cannot seem tender, loving, and attentive in public, and ill-treat you in private?"

“Not for worlds would I have you think so ill of Francis!” cried the countess, emphatically. “No, he has surrounded me with all the elements of that happiness which gold can procure; and his constant study is to render my life as agreeable as it may be.”

“This mystery is incomprehensible,” said the duchess. “I am pained, grieved to the inmost recesses of my heart, to think that my best friend should be unhappy, and that she should fear to entrust me with the cause of her sorrow.”

“You know not how I long, how ardently I crave to unbosom myself to you, dearest Georgiana,” returned the countess, bending upon her companion those eyes which were usually so brilliant and lustrous, but which were now so mournful and melting. “Your words have already penetrated like a balm into my soul; the tender sympathy which you have manifested toward me has done me good. Yes, the love of a dear friend must be an incalculable relief; but it would kill me to think that this friend should ever have cause to blush for her in whose behalf she has shown such generous feelings.”

“I blush for you, Eleanor!” exclaimed the duchess, more and more astonished at this species of self-accusation on the part of the countess. “Oh, that were impossible! I know you to be virtue itself.”

“But is there not the sin of the thoughts as well as of the actions?” inquired Eleanor, in a subdued and mournful tone. “Alas! since the confession must be made, and I see that I cannot resist the influence which prompts me now to unbosom my soul to you —”

“Speak freely, fearlessly,” said the duchess, observing that her friend still hesitated. “It will prove one of the most delicious moments of my life if I can in any way soothe the secret sorrow which you cherish.”

“Ere now, my beloved Georgiana,” resumed the countess, “you complimented me by saying that I was virtue itself. But you know not how unworthy I am of the good opinion which you have thus formed of me. It is true that if the chastity of the body be all that is required to constitute virtue, I am indeed virtuous. But may not a polluted soul dwell in a chaste body, even as a pure soul may inhabit a body that is polluted? The woman whose honour is violently wrested from her by the miscreant ravisher is still chaste in

mind though tainted in person; and, on the other hand, the woman who is even a virgin in bodily innocence may be a very Messalina in passions, cravings, and desires. Do you understand me, my dear friend?" asked the countess, without raising her head, but with a burning blush suffusing her entire countenance and pouring its crimson glow over her neck, her shoulders, and her bosom.

"I understand that you have involved yourself in a net of sophistry and metaphysical argument which cannot regard yourself," responded the duchess. "It is true that virtue may be a negative quality only, in some instances; but as you have already assured me that you love no man, you have no possible inducement to prove faithless to your husband. Were you enamoured of some handsome youth, and were you on that account wrestling against temptation, it would not be difficult to comprehend your position."

"And then, perhaps, the crime were more venial than when the soul has to combat with passions and cravings which have no particular object to excite them," murmured Eleanor, covering her countenance with her hands.

"I understand you at length," whispered the Duchess of Devonshire, leaning toward her friend, on whose shoulder she placed her hand. "You are upon those unhappy terms with your husband which deprive you of the enjoyment of conjugal rites, and you are not of a temperament to allow so saintlike an existence to be even tolerable. If this be the case, Eleanor, you need not blush to avow it, for I candidly admit that the result of such privation would be the same with me."

"And yet we are so differently situated," exclaimed the countess, raising her blushing face timidly toward that of the brilliant and voluptuous Georgiana; "for as yet you have only obtained an insight into a portion of my secret, you have only learned the least and most insignificant part of my weakness. Alas! you alluded to the unhappy terms on which I exist with my husband; but you have yet to hear and be amazed at the cause of that severance which is scarcely veiled by the mockery of our living beneath the same roof."

"And this cause — what can it be?" asked Georgiana, taking her friend's hand and pressing it between both her own.

The Countess of Desborough hesitated upwards of a min-

ute; she was evidently afraid of giving a reply to the question, and she was unable to find language wherewith to frame that answer. But, suddenly calling all her courage to aid her in achieving a confession which had gone thus far, she placed her lips to the ears of the duchess, and hastily whispered a few words.

The magnificent Georgiana started as if a serpent had stung her, so amazed was she by the extraordinary and unexpected revelation which she had thus heard; but Eleanor, devoured with shame, and unable to endure the look of mingled incredulity, surprise, and compassion which the duchess fixed upon her, threw herself on the bosom of her friend, and, concealing her burning countenance there, gave vent to her feelings in a flood of tears.

"My poor Eleanor, be comforted," at length said the Duchess of Devonshire. "It is not grief which you should pour forth, but vengeance which you should crave."

"No, no, not vengeance," sobbed the generous souled countess; "for he has done all that mortal could to make amends for a flagrant wrong. Alas!" she continued, raising her head, and casting down the eyes on the long lashes of which trembled the pearly drops, "I hate and detest myself when I think that such a circumstance should embitter my days. But vainly, vainly do I struggle with those passions which consume me, those desires which rage at times so furiously in my bosom."

"Eleanor, you are an angel of virtue, whereas you would represent yourself to be a demoness of profligate thoughts and wanton ideas," exclaimed Georgiana. "There is something more than a negative virtue in your chastity, your forbearance, your purity. But, believe me," added the duchess, emphatically, "believe me when I declare that you will continue to exist the veriest simpleton in Europe if you thus adhere to that virtue which is nothing more or less than a sentimentalism so highly refined and so marvellously sublimated as to be incompatible with the grossness of even the purest mortal nature."

"What would you advise me, Georgiana?" asked the countess, trembling with an undefinable sensation of mingled terror and delight, — terror at the idea of being tempted into evil, and delight at the thought of the evil into which she was thus to be tempted.

"I would regard what you term virtue as a chain, and would cast it off," was the unhesitating and emphatic response.

"Oh, I regret now that I have made you my confidant," exclaimed Eleanor; "for you give form and substance to those ideas the existence of which in my own heart I have never until now dared to acknowledge to myself!"

"You are a perfect phenomenon, Eleanor," returned the duchess. "But I have a great mind to tell you a little secret of my own, for I also have a secret, I can assure you," she added, with an arch smile of ineffable sweetness.

"Oh, but your secret is not one that gives you pain, and that you blush to own," said the countess.

"It certainly gives me no pain," rejoined the Duchess of Devonshire; "and yet I may perhaps blush as I reveal it to you. But if I make you my confidant in that respect, it is only to prove to you that I really regard you in the light of a sister."

"And this secret?" said Eleanor, her curiosity being raised.

"It is explained in a few words," was the response. "I have a lover!"

"Doubtless! Worshipped and adored as you are, Georgiana," said the comparatively unsophisticated countess, "you have hundreds. But a lover in any other sense of the term —"

"Yes, a lover in that sense," interrupted the duchess. "I mean that I have yielded to a fantasy, a whim, a wanton caprice, and have erred without one hundredth part of the excuse which you would have for erring in a similar manner."

"Is this possible, Georgiana?" exclaimed the countess, with an astonishment most real and unfeigned.

"It is true, I can assure you," answered the profligate patrician. "And now are you not ashamed of me?"

"No; I begin to see things in a new light," rejoined Eleanor, gradually becoming familiarized with the contemplation of immorality. And when she remembered that the Princess Sophia herself had yielded to the delights of illicit love, she wondered that she should ever have adhered so rigidly to her own virtuous principles.

"It is not a year ago," continued the duchess, "that I

succumbed to that fantasy and became faithless to my husband. I was seated alone, and in a pensive mood, on a sofa in the red drawing-room at Devonshire House. It was between four and five in the afternoon. Presently the door was thrown open, and a visitor was announced. You know him well; he is one of the handsomest men in Europe. He seated himself by my side upon the sofa, and a conversation on various indifferent topics progressed for some little time. At length I observed that he was surveying me with an earnest attention, an attention which at the moment I fancied to amount almost to rudeness; and the blood rushed to my cheeks. He threw himself on his knees before me, took my hand, pressed it to his lips, and declared that if he had offended me, he would never rise until he had obtained my pardon."

"How singular!" ejaculated the countess. "Something very much resembling all this occurred to myself about three weeks ago. Yes, I also was seated alone and in a pensive mood, in this very room, and on this very sofa, and a visitor came. He is certainly one of the handsomest men in England, and you know him well — But pray continue your narrative, my dear friend," cried Eleanor, suddenly interrupting herself in the midst of the broken explanations which she was giving in a mood of almost involuntary musing.

"Well, as I was observing," resumed the duchess, "my visitor vowed that he would not rise until I pardoned him, which I hastened to do, although, if questioned, I could scarcely have defined the offence which he had committed. Placing himself again by my side, he dexterously and with amazing artifice continued the discourse in such a manner that he gradually brought it to a point at which he suddenly, and as if in a burst of unconquerable enthusiasm, declared his admiration, his passion, his love. I know not what reply I made; but I recollect well that in another moment I was clasped in his arms —"

"More singular still!" ejaculated the countess. "The adventure which I considered to be so insulting to myself was precisely the same."

"But the results were assuredly very different," returned the duchess; "for whereas you must have passed pure and immaculate through the ordeal, I accepted the declaration

of love, and that same evening I visited Carlton House privately and in disguise."

"Carlton House!" exclaimed Eleanor, with increasing wonderment.

"Yes, for the lover to whom I have alluded is the Prince of Wales," rejoined Georgiana.

"And it was the Prince of Wales who would have made a victim of me!" cried the countess.

"Then is it most singular that my love-story should have elicited yours, the hero being the same," said the duchess, by no means chagrined at this proof of her royal paramour's fickleness. "I am not jealous of the prince; it were ridiculous to be so. I am well aware that his love-adventures are innumerable; and if I were to sigh each time I learn that I have a rival in his caprices, — for we will not call them affections, — I should be only making myself miserable from morning to night."

"True!" murmured Eleanor, in whose bosom new and exciting thoughts had been engendered by all that the Duchess of Devonshire had said to her on this occasion.

"And therefore, my dear friend," added the wanton and voluptuous Georgiana, "if you should think fit to lend a willing ear to the prince's seductive words, I shall not experience the slightest annoyance. But I must now say farewell, Eleanor, and I shall expect to see you at Devonshire House in the course of to-morrow or next day; for I must assuredly become your tutress and guide into the realms of pleasure. Adieu, my dear friend."

With these words, the duchess embraced Lady Desborough, and took her departure.

Eleanor had escorted her Grace as far as the landing outside the apartment; and, as she was returning slowly and in a thoughtful mood to her seat upon the sofa, it suddenly flashed to her mind, like a glare of lightning, that if any one had happened to be in the inner drawing-room it were easy to have overheard some portion, if not the whole, of the preceding conversation, the two saloons being only separated from each other by folding-doors.

A terrible sickness seized upon the heart of the countess as this source of alarm sprang up in her mind; and opening one of the doors, she entered the adjacent apartment.

But a vertigo appeared to fasten upon her brain when she

caught sight of her husband, yes, the Earl of Desborough, seated at the table, apparently bending over a book, and with his back toward her.

She staggered a few paces, and was on the point of falling; but in a moment she perceived the tremendous precipice on which she stood. In an instant she saw the necessity of gathering all her courage and presence of mind to her aid, if she wished to relieve herself from a state of awful suspense and ascertain whether he had actually overheard her conversation with the duchess, or not.

"What! are you here?" she said, in a faint and faltering tone, advancing at the same time and laying her hand upon his shoulder.

"Ah! my dearest Eleanor," he exclaimed, starting up; but it struck her that he was very pale.

"Have you been here long?" she asked, her tone becoming still more tremulous, and her entire frame quivering like an aspen leaf.

"Yes — that is, not many minutes," he replied, instantly correcting his first monosyllabic answer. "I have been reading that book, and was so absorbed in its contents that I really forgot how long I could have been here."

And he smiled, but, as it struck her, with a ghastly attempt to conceal horrible thoughts.

"What book is it?" she inquired, hastily bending down her head to hide the shame which flushed her cheeks, and not shame only, but torturing terror of the most agonizing nature.

No pen can describe the exquisite acuteness to which her feelings were now wrought up, when she saw that the volume lying open on the table was upside down! The barbed point of a lance thrust into her heart and then torn violently out again — supposing that it were possible to live through such an infernal process of cruelty — could not have been accompanied with an anguish more rending than that which the unhappy lady now felt. Her brain was on fire, molten lead was circulating in her veins, the tortures of hell were lacerating her soul.

But suddenly it flashed to her imagination that her husband might have turned the book in this manner at the moment when he started from his seat at the words which she had addressed to him and on feeling her hand upon his

shoulder. Revived by the hope, which was instantly followed by the thought that if he had overheard her conversation with the duchess it would be impossible for him to appear even as cool and collected as he was, Eleanor raised her countenance again, saying, "Were you not aware that an old friend of mine was with me just now? She would have been delighted to see you."

"Yes, I understood that you had company, — the Duchess of Devonshire, was it not?" observed the earl, in a tone which struck the countess to be ominously peculiar and unnatural. "But I did not choose to disturb you," he added, almost immediately. "Besides, I do not feel very well this afternoon."

"Has anything occurred to vex or annoy you, Francis?" inquired the countess; and, as she spoke, she darted a rapid but searching, scrutinizing, penetrating glance upon her husband's countenance.

"Annoy me! Oh, nothing, nothing, I can assure you, dear Eleanor," he exclaimed, taking her hand and carrying it to his lips. Then instantly dropping it, and, as she thought, at least, with singular abruptness, as if it had suddenly become loathsome to him after his mouth had thus touched it, he said, "No, I have nothing to annoy me, unless it be the perverse conduct of Fernanda, in so obstinately refusing the reparation which Arthur Eaton so honourably offered. Have you seen Fernanda to-day?"

"She has kept her room, as you know, almost ever since her return home, a few days ago," answered Eleanor, gradually becoming reassured, though still experiencing an oppressive uneasiness, for she could not subdue the idea that there was something remarkably strange, forced, and unnatural in her husband's manner.

At this moment a domestic entered, to announce that dinner was served.

The earl instantly proffered Eleanor his arm, and, as he escorted her to the dining-room below, he turned the conversation on some leading topic of the day, and which was quite distinct from their own concerns; then, after they were seated at table, he continued to discourse in the same strain, and with a better flow of spirits than he was accustomed to enjoy. The result was that Eleanor's apprehensions gradually subsided, until they passed away altogether; and,

feeling convinced that her husband had not overheard anything which occurred between herself and the Duchess of Devonshire, she concluded that what she had fancied to be an ominous singularity of manner on his part was only the work of her own fevered imagination and guilty conscience.

For Eleanor did look upon the revelation which she had made to the duchess and the thoughts to which she had yielded subsequently as crimes which she had committed.

CHAPTER IX

THE COUNTESS AND THE MILLINER

BETWEEN eleven and twelve o'clock on the following morning, Mrs. Brace, attended by a young person dressed in mourning, alighted from a hackney-coach at the door of the Earl of Desborough's mansion in Berkeley Square.

The young person just alluded to carried a large bandbox in her hand; for, being the junior assistant in Mrs. Brace's establishment, it was her duty to accompany her mistress on such occasions as the present. She, however, remained below, in a species of waiting-room opening from the hall, while the milliner, taking the bandbox, ascended to the bed-chamber of the countess.

Eleanor, having passed a restless and feverish night, had not long risen from her couch. Dressed in a charming *déshabillé*, she was half-reclining in a capacious armchair near the fire, and playing with, rather than partaking of the cup of chocolate which stood on a little table at her right hand.

Her raven hair was negligently gathered up into bands, the rich masses of which framed with ebony her spotless forehead; she was pale, and an appearance of languor was expressed on her countenance and pervaded her entire form.

The lady's-maid, having ushered in Mrs. Brace, immediately retired; and the milliner was left alone with the countess.

"I had really forgotten my appointment with you this morning," said the latter.

"If it will suit your ladyship better, I can easily call again," answered Mrs. Brace, in her most dulcet tones.

"No, I would not give you so much trouble, since you have come on purpose," rejoined the countess. "Have you brought the purple velvet dress —"

"I am invariably punctual in executing your ladyship's commands," observed the milliner.

Rising from her seat, and slowly divesting herself of the elegant morning wrapper which she wore, Eleanor proceeded to try on the new dress in front of a *psyche*, or full-length looking-glass, which reflected her fine figure on its polished surface. Indeed, as she thus stood for a few moments, with her exquisitely shaped shoulders, her beauteous neck, and her well-rounded arms completely bare, with the closely fitting but not tightly laced corset setting off her symmetry, and developing every contour, and with her feet and ankles, up to the swell of the leg, appearing below the short petticoat, she seemed a perfect model of loveliness; and Mrs. Brace could not help thinking at the time that it was indeed no wonder if the Prince of Wales burned so ardently to possess her.

The velvet robe was tried on, and it fitted admirably. The low body revealed half the bust, the arms were left bare almost to the very shoulders, where the miniature sleeves were looped up with rows of pearls, and from the waist the glossy skirt flowed in massive folds, shining with a lustrous richness where the light from the windows fell upon them, and deeply dark in the shades between.

"You are really a most accomplished *artiste* in your profession," said the Countess of Desborough, well pleased with the result of the experiment, and surveying herself in the glass not altogether without a feeling of vanity, for she saw that she was handsome, gloriously handsome; and the thought raised up a glow of pride to her cheeks so pale before.

"I thank your ladyship for the compliment," returned Mrs. Brace, whose full and largely rounded form presented a voluptuous contrast with the elegant, graceful, and dignified loveliness of the patrician. "Permit me to observe that this dress suits your ladyship admirably; it will undulate with every movement, and thereby become almost as expressive as gestures."

"Your art, then, has its mysteries as well as those which are acknowledged to be of a more complex nature," said the Countess of Desborough, with a smile.

"Your ladyship, perhaps, is unaware how much depends upon the dress," returned the milliner. "The most faultless shape may be rendered faulty thereby; and it should be

made so as to accompany, as it were, each and every motion of the form, as if it were a part thereof. The great secrets of the art are to do justice to a fine figure, and improve a bad one."

"You should write a treatise upon the mysteries of that art, Mrs. Brace," said the countess, smiling again at the information which her milliner was imparting.

"Pardon me, my lady," responded the latter, "but these are secrets which must not be published to the world in general. Oh, I can assure your ladyship that Mrs. Fitzherbert, her Grace of Devonshire, Lady Jersey, and many others of my most eminent patronesses often condescend to listen to me while I explain these things."

"Ah! you are employed by Mrs. Fitzherbert, Lady Jersey, and my dear friend the Duchess of Devonshire?" said the countess, in a musing tone, for it struck her as being singular that Mrs. Brace should have mentioned by name three ladies who were intimately connected with the Prince of Wales.

"Such is the fact, I can assure your ladyship," answered the milliner. "And perhaps your ladyship will excuse me for mentioning that his Royal Highness, the heir apparent, never fancies any dress worn by Mrs. Fitzherbert unless made at my establishment."

"Is his Royal Highness so excellent a connoisseur in respect to ladies' attire?" asked Eleanor, as she laid aside her new velvet dress and, resuming her morning wrapper, threw herself languidly back again into the large armchair, her pretty feet, imprisoned in elegant slippers, now resting on an ottoman.

"Since your ladyship puts the question to me," responded Mrs. Brace, thus ingeniously directing the discourse toward the topic on which she was anxious to touch, "I will unhesitatingly inform you that his Royal Highness is not only an excellent judge in such matters, but that he volunteers his opinion on many points at those times when I have the honour to wait on Mrs. Fitzherbert in order to submit the latest fashions to her. Would your ladyship be offended if I were to confess that Mrs. Fitzherbert has seen your velvet robe, and highly approves of it?"

"Oh, certainly I cannot be offended on that account," exclaimed Eleanor. "But how did it happen?"

"I waited upon Mrs. Fitzherbert an hour ago to exhibit

those beautiful caps," continued Mrs. Brace, indicating the objects of her remark, which she had carefully deposited upon the bed. "When I opened the bandbox, she caught a glimpse of the velvet dress, and insisted upon seeing it. I dared not refuse compliance with her demand, and she was enchanted. Indeed, to tell your ladyship the truth, I am to make her one according to the same fashion, without delay. But, by the bye," added the milliner, with a frankness and candour so well assumed that the countess was completely duped by the apparent artlessness of her manner, "I should have observed that his Royal Highness was seated at breakfast with Mrs. Fitzherbert at the time, and that — But, no, I dare not say any more."

And Mrs. Brace pretended to be suddenly animated by a second thought which threw her into confusion.

"Oh, I cannot allow you to break off thus in the middle of your narrative," exclaimed Eleanor, whose curiosity was excited, she scarcely knew why, unless, indeed, it were by a presentiment that the prince had mentioned her name in complimentary terms.

"If your ladyship's commands be that I should tell you everything which really occurred this morning at Carlton House," said Mrs. Brace, "I cannot, of course, prove disobedient."

"Yes, let me hear it all," returned Eleanor, half-ashamed at thus indulging in what she could only look upon as the most frivolous gossip; and yet her heart palpitated all the while.

"Well, I will be explicit," continued Mrs. Brace, who was thus deliberately and coolly inventing a scene at Carlton House which had not taken place at all; for she had come direct from her own abode to Berkeley Square, and had not set eyes on Mrs. Fitzherbert for some weeks past. "The moment I produced your splendid velvet dress, Mrs. Fitzherbert was in raptures, and she insisted upon knowing whom it was for. I accordingly mentioned your ladyship's name; upon hearing which, his Royal Highness burst forth into such enthusiastic praises of your ladyship's beauty, figure, elegant gait, and fascinating manners, that — But I am really trembling from head to foot lest I should offend your ladyship," exclaimed the artful milliner, appearing to be suddenly seized with renewed confusion and embarrassment.

"Nay, I am not so easily chagrined or hurt," exclaimed Eleanor, affecting to experience no other sentiment than that of amusement at this tittle-tattle, whereas her bosom was in reality heaving with indescribable emotions.

"I thank your ladyship for relieving me of the apprehension that I might give offence," resumed the wily milliner. "I was informing your ladyship that the prince broke out into enthusiastic eulogies, when Mrs. Fitzherbert interrupted him sharply."

"And what did Mrs. Fitzherbert say?" inquired Eleanor, her cheeks glowing as she recalled to mind the impassioned kisses that the heir apparent had imprinted on her lips.

"Mrs. Fitzherbert exclaimed, 'Everybody knows that Lady Desborough is one of the handsomest women in England; but you need not dwell upon her charms, for all that.' To which the prince replied, 'There is no harm in admiring a beautiful creature like the countess; indeed, a man must possess a heart of stone who cannot worship female loveliness wherever it exists.'"

"And are you sure that there is no exaggeration in your narrative?" exclaimed Eleanor, affecting to laugh, while in reality she was deeply moved; and had the prince been with her at that moment, and none else present, his Royal Highness would not, perhaps, have been repulsed as on the former occasion.

"I can assure your ladyship that I have not coloured my tale in the least," said Mrs. Brace. "By the bye, I am to return again to Carlton House in the afternoon, with the patterns of the velvet for Mrs. Fitzherbert's dress."

"Well, but what induced you to tell me that you were to return thither?" inquired the Countess of Desborough.

"Oh, nothing my lady," ejaculated the milliner. "Only I was thinking how annoyed Mrs. Fitzherbert would be, if, just for the sake of a little mischief, I were to tell his Royal Highness in her presence that I had communicated to your ladyship all the particulars which occurred ere now at Carlton House."

"You cannot dream of such a thing!" ejaculated Eleanor, her pride suddenly prevailing over the tender and voluptuous thoughts which had been excited in her bosom.

"Pray forgive me for the indiscretion which I have perpetrated!" cried the milliner, appearing to be quite grieved

at this sudden change in the manner of her patroness; and, in fact, she saw that she had gone a little too far. "No, my lady, I am incapable of such conduct, I can assure you. At the same time, it must be as galling to Mrs. Fitzherbert to know that the prince is desperately in love with your ladyship as it is complimentary to you."

"You do not mean to imply that the few flattering phrases which his Royal Highness condescended to utter concerning me denote anything of so serious a nature on his part?" said Eleanor, with a softened tone and manner.

"If I were to explain my real sentiments to your ladyship, you would only upbraid me again," observed the milliner, affecting to be busied in putting on her bonnet and scarf preparatory to taking her departure.

"No, I promise to be less hasty with you, my good Mrs. Brace," said the countess. "Speak frankly and candidly; for, although it be but idle gossip, the mere pastime of chit-chat —"

"Precisely so, my lady," said the milliner. "You have given me permission to explain my real sentiments? Well, I will tell you, honestly and sincerely, then, how I read the feelings of his Royal Highness. He loves, he adores, he worships you."

"Mrs. Brace, this is language which I dare not listen to," exclaimed Eleanor, the crimson tide flooding her cheeks, her neck, her very bosom.

"Did I not say that your ladyship would only scold me?" cried the milliner, affecting to be plunged into the most painful bewilderment. "What am I to do? Your ladyship condescends to listen to me, commands me to speak frankly, and then covers me with your displeasure."

"I was wrong, my good creature," said the Countess of Desborough; "for I admit that I gave you encouragement to make this extraordinary and most unexpected revelation. But how can you possibly be so foolish as to construe into a serious sentiment the few idle compliments which the prince was pleased to utter concerning me?"

"Ah! my lady," returned Mrs. Brace, "if you had studied human nature as profoundly as I have done, your ladyship would not be so skeptical. There is a wide and essential difference between mere passing flattery and those enthusiastic praises which come from the heart. Think you, my

lady, that the prince, in a moment of perfect good temper, would wantonly provoke a quarrel with Mrs. Fitzherbert by exciting her jealousy? Assuredly not. The truth is, that he was carried away by his feelings, he was borne along by the tide of rapturous emotions, and the words he uttered flowed irresistibly from his heart. Had his life depended on the issue, he could not have stayed that passionate ebullition of glowing praises. The spell of your ladyship's beauty gave an impulse to his language, which rendered him magnificently eloquent; and, oh, how handsome and godlike did he appear when thus breathing forth the evidences of a love, an ardent love, the existence of which he could not conceal even though in the presence of Mrs. Fitzherbert. His soul, speaking through his eyes as intelligibly as by his tongue, was one flame of passion. His cheeks mantled and his heart throbbed, as if the incantation of your witching beauty was upon him. Oh, I could read all that was passing in his mind, in his heart, in the profundities of his soul, and I pitied him."

"You pitied him?" said Eleanor, in a languid and tremulous tone, as a thousand agitating thoughts and tender feelings swept through her.

"Pardon me for making the observation, my lady," returned the milliner, throwing some emotion into her own voice; "but I must frankly confess that I did pity him then, do pity him now."

"Then he loves me," murmured Eleanor, leaning her head upon her hand and falling into a deep reverie, which lasted several minutes. At length, raising her eyes, and starting at beholding Mrs. Brace, whose presence she had forgotten during that interval of profound meditation, she said, "You must think me very vain, very silly, very foolish to have listened with so much apparent attention to all you have been telling me; but it has served to while away an hour," she added, glancing at the timepiece upon the mantel, "and I thank you for your kind endeavours to amuse me."

"I hope your ladyship does not imagine that I have uttered a single word which is not literally true, or in which I do not conscientiously believe," said Mrs. Brace.

"No, I give you credit for sincerity," responded Eleanor. Then, her pride again coming to her aid, she observed, in a tone which denoted her desire that the conversation should

end, "You may leave two of the morning caps, those which you think will become me best."

Mrs. Brace was too discreet not to take the hint thus conveyed; she accordingly made her curtsy and withdrew.

But as the crafty and designing milliner descended the stairs, she chuckled inwardly at the effect which she saw had been produced by her specious language on the mind of the Countess of Desborough; and she said to herself, "That proud patrician lady will ere long surrender the fortalice of her charms to the prince."

On entering the waiting-room adjoining the hall, the milliner found the young lady in deep mourning whom she had left there, conversing with a tall, thin, pale, but very handsome and interesting young man, dressed in a neat though homely garb.

"Now, Miss Morton, my dear," said Mrs. Brace, "we will return home."

"I am at your service, madam," answered the beautiful girl; and, with a gentle inclination of the head toward the young man, she followed her mistress from the room.

When they were in the hackney-coach together, the milliner said, "Who was that person you were talking to, Camilla?"

"He is a stranger to me, madam," was the prompt and ingenuous reply. "Indeed, he had not been in the apartment many minutes ere you came."

"My dear Camilla," said Mrs. Brace, in her kindest tone, "I am not in the least vexed with you. I know that you are a good girl and will follow my advice in all things, and that is sufficient. Indeed, I have promised to become a mother to you, and I will keep my word."

"Oh, my dear madam, how grateful am I to you for this assurance!" exclaimed the young girl, who was as beautiful as the sweet Christian name to which she answered, and who now appeared deeply, deeply interesting as her eyes flashed looks of gratitude through her tears, as if they were lighted up with twin drops of the diamond dew.

"Come, my dear child," said Mrs. Brace, "wipe away all traces of weeping, for you have a little commission to execute for me at this house where the coach is about to stop."

And as the milliner uttered these words, the vehicle, in pursuance of the directions which she had already given to

the driver, drew up at the front door of a splendid mansion in Piccadilly.

"I am anxious that this note," said Mrs. Brace, handing Camilla a neatly folded billet, "should be delivered to Lord Florimel, and to him only. It must not be conveyed through a servant, and I do not wish to deliver it myself."

"I understand you, madam," said the artless, innocent, and unsuspecting Camilla, perfectly satisfied with this explanation. "You desire me to solicit an interview with his lordship and place the note in his hands."

"That is exactly what I mean, my love," responded Mrs. Brace, with bland tone and caressing manner.

The beautiful girl, anxious to testify her readiness to oblige a mistress who promised to be a mother to her, descended from the vehicle; and, the front door of the mansion being by this time open, in obedience to the summons given by the coachman, she inquired of the powdered and lace-bedizened lackey whether Lord Florimel was at home. An answer was returned in the affirmative; and she was conducted into a small but elegantly furnished parlour, where the young nobleman, in a morning garb, was lounging in an armchair by the blazing fire, perusing a novel.

The instant that Camilla made her appearance, he was struck by the beauty of her person, the modesty of her demeanour, and the sylphlike symmetry of her form. Advancing bashfully, almost timidly, toward him, she presented the note, observing, in a soft and silver tone, "Mrs. Brace sends this, my lord, with her respectful compliments."

Florimel instantly comprehended, by the fact of the fair creature being in mourning, that she was the same young person of whom Mrs. Brace had spoken to him on that morning when she received him in her bedchamber, and when he so nearly surrendered to the attractions of her matured and voluptuous charms. Casting upon Miss Morton another look of deep and tender interest, Florimel opened the note, which contained only these words:

"What think you, my dear friend, of the bearer of this? You are a naughty man for not coming to see me. Pray explain this absence of several days, not by letter, but in person. I shall expect you to sup with me on any evening you may choose to appoint; and if it be agreeable to you, I can promise that the bearer, Miss Camilla Morton, shall

be of the party. All you need now say to her is that you will attend to the note."

"Tell your kind mistress that I will give my early attention to her letter," he said.

Camilla thanked his lordship and retired, followed by the looks of the young and noble voluptuary, who was enraptured by the elegance of the retreating figure which his eyes thus devoured, and ravished by the glimpse which he caught of a foot and ankle of the most enchanting shape.

But just at the moment when Miss Morton was descending the steps of the front door, two young ladies, beautifully dressed, extremely handsome, and evidently sisters, who happened to be passing, stopped short; and one of them, exclaiming to the other, "That is Gabriel's house," fixed a searching look upon Camilla.

The young girl, though utterly unconscious of having done anything wrong, nevertheless blushed up to the very forehead on finding herself the object of this unaccountable scrutiny; and the lady from whose lips the ejaculation had burst and who was thus intently regarding her, said, in a somewhat imperious tone, "I presume, miss, that you have been to see Lord Florimel?"

Camilla was so confused that she could make no reply; and the blush upon her cheeks deepened into the liveliest crimson.

"Oh, I comprehend it all!" exclaimed the young lady, drawing herself up with a superb dignity, while the glow of wounded pride flushed her magnificent countenance. Then turning to her sister, she said, "Come, Octavia, let us continue our walk."

And as the two ladies passed on together, Camilla hurried into the vehicle, whence Mrs. Brace had observed all that had just occurred.

The hackney-coach proceeded toward Pall Mall; and the milliner, after receiving the message which Lord Florimel had sent her, and at which she was secretly delighted, said, "Those two ladies behaved very rudely to you, my love; but it was evidently some misapprehension on their part."

"I am afraid that I did wrong in venturing alone into the presence of that nobleman," observed Miss Morton, the tears streaming down her cheeks as she smarted under the indignity which she had experienced at the hands of the two

ladies. "What could they mean? Why did they regard me so intently? What did they take me for?"

"Tranquillize yourself, my dear child," said Mrs. Brace, never at a loss for expedients to explain away a difficulty, and by no means desirous that Camilla should be shocked by the late proceeding, whence unpleasant suspicions might be engendered in the mind of the artless girl. "I can satisfy you on every point. Those two young ladies were his lordship's cousins, and the younger, who insulted you, is the one owing me the money. Catching a glimpse of my face in the coach, she suspected your errand; and that was the reason of her insolent conduct."

Camilla was immediately relieved by this explanation, composed of a tissue of falsehoods though it were; for the milliner had perfectly well recognized the daughters of Mr. Clarendon, and had taken very good care that Octavia should not see her.

The hackney-coach drove rapidly on toward Pall Mall, Mrs. Brace having no more visits to make or commissions for Miss Morton to execute on the present occasion.

CHAPTER X

THE SURGEON

OUR readers will not have forgotten a certain Mr. Thurston, who figured in the opening chapters of our narrative. This medical gentleman, having not only accumulated money by unwearied application to his business and by habits of the strictest parsimony, but having also received the munificent sum of ten thousand pounds as a recompense for taking charge of the Princess Sophia's child, removed from the Edgeware Road into the fashionable district of Mayfair.

The house which he thus took was large and of handsome appearance; it stood at the corner of a long paved alley forming the entrance to a mews, and whence a door communicated with the yard at the back of his premises. The interior of the dwelling he furnished in a costly style, well knowing how much the world is in the habit of judging a medical man's talents by his pecuniary prosperity and the style in which he lives. In this instance, therefore, neither Mr. Thurston nor his niggard wife spared their gold in embellishing their new abode; for it was a matter of calculation that the more they thus laid out the greater would become the professional practice and the larger the returns of revenue.

The infant who had been entrusted to the care of these people, and whom they had adopted as their own son under the name of Godfrey Thurston, thrived admirably.

It was only on the very morning of those incidents which we have detailed in the preceding chapter that the brass plate, with Mr. Thurston's name and profession engraved thereon, had been duly fixed upon the front door of the new house in Mayfair.

In the afternoon, a tall, handsome-looking gentleman, enveloped in a cloak lined with sables, was walking, not ex-

actly in a leisurely, but rather in an abstracted and mournful mood, along the street, when he suddenly caught sight of the brass plate.

Struck by some idea, which rapidly gained an influence upon him, he fixed his eyes for a few moments on the brass plate, then walked on a few paces, then looked back again at the surgeon's abode, and then pursued his way, but with every evidence of indecision and hesitation in his manner.

At length, before he had gained the end of the street, he turned with the decision of a man who has abruptly resolved on taking a particular step, although a disagreeable one; and, retracing his path to the surgeon's house, he knocked at the door.

A domestic in a handsome livery immediately answered the summons, and inquired the visitor's name.

"I wish to consult your master professionally," was the reply, but unaccompanied with the announcement of any name.

The domestic led the way through a fine marble hall, to a carpeted passage communicating with the surgery parlour, which joined the surgery itself, both being at the back part of the house. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; and Mr. Thurston rose from a table where he had been engaged in writing, when the visitor was conducted into his presence.

"Your name, sir," said Mr. Thurston.

"It were a ridiculous affectation to conceal it," was the answer, "because I live at no very great distance, and because my rank would be certain to render you acquainted with my person in a short time. Nevertheless, it is in the strictest confidence, and relying on your honour, that I have come to consult you upon an important, an afflicting, a most delicate matter. I am the Earl of Desborough."

Mr. Thurston wrote down the name in his book, and then said, "Your lordship may trust me."

"I perceive that you have only recently settled in this neighbourhood," observed the nobleman; "and the recommendations of an influential friend may not prove a mean auxiliary to your own professional abilities. Those recommendations shall you have from me, that friend will I become."

"I most sincerely thank your lordship," said Mr. Thurston.

"Lady Desborough and myself have our regular family physician," continued the earl; "but it happens that our surgeon has lately quitted the metropolis. Under these circumstances, therefore, you shall henceforth supply his place. Do not, however, think, Mr. Thurston," he added, emphatically, "that I am saying all this merely with a view to bind you to my interests or appeal to a vulgar mercenary feeling. Such is not my intention; I am incapable of thus insulting you. But I wish you to understand that I have resolved to consult you in a certain matter, to entrust you with my sad secret, and to place the utmost reliance upon you, because we have hitherto been total strangers to each other, because you come into a new neighbourhood where some trifling amount of patronage may be useful, and because —"

"Because you believe that, under any circumstances, I am more likely to keep your lordship's secret. This is your lordship's view," added Mr. Thurston, in a decisive tone, "and it is a correct one."

"I am glad that you have put the matter thus frankly upon its proper basis," said the earl. Then drawing forth from his purse a bank-note for five hundred pounds, he added, "This is your retaining fee."

Mr. Thurston bowed his thanks.

"I must inform you, sir," resumed the earl, his manner suddenly becoming painfully embarrassed, "that I approach with the deepest humiliation, with the acutest sense of shame, the subject of my visit. Married for some years to a lady of extraordinary beauty and of the strictest virtue, but whose temperament is naturally of an ardent, glowing, and impassionate nature — I — But, just Heaven! how can I induce my tongue to frame the confession —"

And, suddenly starting from the seat which he had taken on entering the room, the earl began to pace to and fro in the wildest agitation.

Mr. Thurston said nothing.

Suddenly checking his frantic walk up and down the surgery parlour, the earl laid his right hand heavily upon the surgeon's shoulder, and, bending his head until his lips nearly touched Thurston's ear, he said, in a thick, hoarse, and low voice, "Five thousand pounds are yours if you can give me

any hope; for I — wretch that I am — Oh, do not look up at me as I speak — I am — ”

And the remaining word, which proclaimed the fatal secret and confirmed the medical man's previous suspicion, was conveyed in the lowest audible whisper.

“ Now you are acquainted with my misery, and my heart is already easier,” said the nobleman, flinging himself once more on the seat which he had ere now quitted.

“ Then there is no hope, Mr. Thurston? ” said the earl, after a long private conference; and he spoke in a voice which betrayed how deeply he was moved.

“ None, my lord,” was the emphatic answer. “ It would be downright robbery to take a shilling from you for such a purpose. Besides, your lordship has already remunerated me far too handsomely.”

“ Say not a word upon that subject,” returned the nobleman. “ My secret — ”

“ Is the same as if it had never been confided to me,” rejoined Mr. Thurston.

“ I thank you, sincerely thank you,” said the earl; and pressing the surgeon's hand with convulsive violence, the unfortunate nobleman took his departure.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and Mr. Thurston was alone in the surgery.

The surgery had three doors: one communicated with the parlour where he had received the Earl of Desborough, and which was intended for the reception of persons calling to consult him; the second opened into the yard at the back of the building; and the third communicated with an apartment of which we shall have to speak more in a future chapter. But these details, trivial as they may now appear, must be borne in mind.

Presently a bell in the surgery rang.

Mr. Thurston opened the door leading into the yard, and, passing out, he unfastened the gate communicating with the stables before alluded to.

A man immediately entered the premises, and Thurston conducted him, without saying a word, into the surgery, closing the door carefully behind him.

The individual whom he had thus admitted into his sanc-

tum was a short, strong-built, ill-looking fellow, with a repulsive countenance, and a sinister leer in the small reptile-like eyes which did one harm to meet their gaze. He was clothed in a coarse, rough, and negligent manner, but not through poverty; for the villain's ill-gotten gains were sufficient in the course of a month to keep an entire family in a respectable style for a whole year.

This man was Miles the Buzgloak.

"Well, sir," he said, as soon as the surgeon had closed the door, "you see I'm punctual to the appointment which you was kind enough to give me. So you've got into your new house, eh? Well, I only hope your business will increase accordingly, and then I shall have all the more of your pay-tronage."

"I did not send for you here to bestow your conversation upon me," exclaimed Mr. Thurston, sharply. "You are well aware what I require. Can you manage it for me soon and secretly?"

"As for secrecy," responded Miles, "your honour knows that it's the very first principle of our business; and as for doing it soon, I can promise the thing for next Monday night, and no mistake whatsoever."

"Ah! next Monday night!" ejaculated the surgeon, a thought striking him. "Yes, I remember. It was said in this morning's paper that next Monday is the day fixed — But you mean me to have one of them, eh?"

"You can't have a better, sir," responded the man. "The young 'un will suit your book to a nicety."

"Well, be it so. And if any obstacle should arise in that quarter —"

"Then I must get you another, that's all," answered the Buzgloak. "But it ain't likely; so if you'll be prepared next Monday night to receive me and my partner Dick the Trumper, who's as fine a fellow as any under the sun, 'specially at this here sort of work —"

"I have no doubt of his merits whatsoever," interrupted Mr. Thurston, laconically. "At midnight — as near that hour as possible — I shall expect you."

"Make your mind easy, sir," exclaimed the Buzgloak, with a significant leer. "At twelve o'clock, or thereabouts, you'll hear the bell a-tinkling, sure enough. And having got so far, we'll just settle about the price, and then I'll take my

walyable carcase off, 'cos I've got another appintment on some business for this evening."

"Name your own terms, and I can easily say whether I agree to them, or not," observed the medical gentleman.

"Well, forty shiners won't hurt you," said Miles, fixing his serpent eyes upon Thurston, to see how the price named was relished.

"No, 'tis ten too much," was the answer.

"Come, we'll split the difference, and have no more bother about it," exclaimed the Buzgloak. "Thirty-five, cash on delivery, them's the terms; and on any others Mr. Miles respectfully declines doing business, as the ready-money tradesmen puts on their circulars."

"Be it so," said the surgeon. "At twelve, then, next Monday night, I shall expect you."

"There or thereabouts," responded the Buzgloak. "I know you'll be well satisfied with the result; and the bargain is entirely yourn. It's as cheap as dirt, considering the risk's transportation for life. But poor men like me must live any how —"

"And I don't suppose you are very particular in what way it is," interrupted the medical man, suffering his countenance to relax into a smile. "But we have settled everything, and —"

"And I'll bundle," added Miles.

The man accordingly took his departure, Mr. Thurston conducting him out by the back door.

On leaving the abode of the medical gentleman, Miles the Buzgloak proceeded rapidly toward Westminster; and, passing around the abbey cemetery, he struck into the maze of vile and crowded streets lying in the immediate vicinity of that venerable pile.

From many of the dwellings came the noise of uproarious revelry and the boisterous sounds of drunken orgies, mingled with the shrieks of some unfortunate female whom a paramour was treating with ruffian brutality, and the shrill voice of some querulous wife responding in bitter taunts to the coarse and gruff upbraidings of a worthless husband. Around the doors of the low public-houses were congregated loathsome wretches in female shape, chattering or disputing in loud tones, insulting any respectable person who might

chance to pass that way, and making the whole neighbourhood ring with their vociferations of delight, when some flash fellow or fancy man accosted them with an offer to stand treat for gin.

Miles the Buzgloak pursued his path amidst the pestilential streets which lie behind the abbey; and at length he entered a low public-house, or flash ken, known by the sign of the Jolly Prize-fighters. Nodding familiarly to the landlord as he passed the bar, he entered the tap-room, in which there was only one person seated at the moment he crossed the threshold.

That person was Dick the Tramper, a tall, athletic, stoutly built man, with a shock of fiery red hair, a large round face to match, and bushy whiskers of the same hue.

"Well, Miles, is it all right?" demanded this individual, as his friend threw himself on the same bench near the fire.

"All right," responded the Buzgloak. "The saw-bones Thurston will give thirty-five shiners, and I closed with him."

"That's just what we said we should get by asking forty," observed the Tramper. "Well, I ha'n't been idle either," he continued, in the husky voice that was habitual with him. "I've taken a complete survey of the premises I spoke to you about; and it's easy enow to get in by the area, for it's the on'y house in the square that hasn't got bars at the kitchen winder."

"So far, so good," said Miles. "But what about Joe Warren?"

"Oh, he'll jine in with us," answered Dick the Tramper. "He says he's quite sick of laying hid down yonder; and he'll make one in the affair, if it's on'y to keep hissself in practice. He'll meet us at a certain part of the square which we've agreed upon at half-past twelve precise."

"That's good again!" cried the Buzgloak. "I'm glad the Magsman's in it: nothink never fails that he undertakes. But where's the tools?"

"Jimmy, centre-bit, wrench, skeleton-keys, and pistols, all stowed away safe," responded the Tramper, clapping his hands upon the capacious pockets of his rough coat.

"All right," said Miles, with an approving nod of the head. "Well, we'll start ten minutes arter midnight, eh? and in

the meantime we've got half an hour to smoke a clay and drink a pot or so."

"With all my heart," returned the Tramper.

And the two villains set to work to enjoy themselves accordingly.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROYAL GUEST

WE must now return to the Earl of Desborough, whom we left at the moment when he quitted Mr. Thurston's house in Mayfair.

Summoning all his fortitude to his aid, after the crushing assurance which he had received to the effect that his last and only hope was fruitless, the nobleman returned home, shut himself up in his private apartment, and gave way to a long and painful meditation.

Once he seated himself at his desk and commenced a long letter which he addressed to his wife, and in which he explained the motives that led him to resolve upon self-destruction. While thus engaged, he experienced an unnatural calmness, amounting almost to that joy which animates the desperate man who has resolved upon escaping from the miseries of life by the avenue of suicide; and a smile of satisfaction stole over his countenance as he folded, sealed, and directed the letter. Then he rose from his seat, took his pistols from the case, charged and primed them.

Yes, he had resolved upon self-destruction!

But even at the very instant when he was about to place the muzzle of one of the fatal weapons in his mouth, the idea flashed to his mind that he would dishonour his name, and by reflection dishonour his wife.

Shuddering at the idea of self-destruction which he had dared to harbour, and which for a short space he had contemplated so calmly, shocked to the very soul at the madness to which he had yielded, the wretched earl restored his pistols to their case, and threw into the fire the letter which he had addressed to his wife.

Then, somewhat relieved, he again paced the room; and

at last he ejaculated, in accents of despair, "Yes, it must be that other alternative! There is no help for it — My God! my God!"

Having thus made up his mind to the adoption of a certain plan which, though cruelly revolting and abhorrent to his mind, was, notwithstanding, far less terrible than the idea of suicide, the Earl of Desborough composed his countenance, arranged his dress, ordered his carriage, and repaired direct to Carlton House.

It was about three in the afternoon when the nobleman reached the princely dwelling; and he was immediately ushered into the presence of his Royal Highness, who happened to be alone and disengaged at the time.

At first the heir apparent was somewhat confused when the earl's name was announced; for he knew that Mrs. Brace was to have seen the countess in the morning, and it instantly struck him that she might have managed her business so clumsily as to compromise himself, and that her ladyship had complained to her husband, who was now come to demand explanations of the indignity offered to his wife. But the affable tone and the manner of dignified respect with which Lord Desborough accosted the prince speedily dissipated those apprehensions; and his Royal Highness received the noble visitor with a cordiality enhanced by the relief that his feelings had just experienced.

After the usual compliments had been exchanged and a few observations passed on the leading topics of the day, the Earl of Desborough, drawing his chair closer to that on which the heir apparent was lounging, said, in a subdued and serious tone, "I am about to take an exceeding liberty with your Royal Highness; but I humbly hope that my motives will be rightly understood. Have I permission to explain myself further?"

"Most assuredly, my esteemed friend," exclaimed the prince, wondering to what point this mysterious preface was to lead.

"I thank your Royal Highness for this gracious permission to explain myself," said the nobleman, "and I shall proceed frankly and candidly to state the object of my visit. The indelicate publicity which the Pitt Cabinet has given to the pecuniary affairs of your Royal Highness has both grieved and incensed me. It nevertheless ceases to be a mere rumour

or surmise that your Royal Highness is somewhat annoyed by certain liabilities at the present moment; and as some weeks must elapse ere the House of Commons can possibly come to a vote upon the propositions submitted to it the other day in respect to those embarrassments, I have ventured to seek this interview with your Royal Highness for the purpose of stating that I have at the moment a surplus of twenty thousand pounds in my bankers' hands. If your Royal Highness will condescend to take charge of that amount till the end of the year — ”

“ My dear friend,” interrupted the prince, his countenance lighting up with joy, as he seized the earl's hands and wrung them both with cordial warmth, “ I appreciate all the generosity and delicacy of this proceeding on your part; and I accept with unfeigned gratitude the noble offer which you have made me.”

“ In that case,” said the earl, “ if your Royal Highness would condescend to accept such poor hospitality as I may be enabled this evening to offer — ”

“ Again I express my thanks,” interrupted the prince, delighted at the prospect of a twofold pleasure: namely, of touching twenty thousand pounds on the one hand, and of passing a few hours in company with the charming Eleanor on the other. “ If it be agreeable to your lordship and your amiable countess, I will take dinner with you this evening. But pray let us enjoy a friendly privacy — ”

“ It is precisely this that I intended to propose,” said the earl. “ Her ladyship will feel honoured by the presence of your Royal Highness,” he added, his voice becoming slightly tremulous and the colour deepening somewhat on his cheeks; but, recovering his composure so speedily that his transient emotion was not observed by the prince, he added, “ At eight o'clock we shall expect your Royal Highness.”

“ I shall be punctual,” responded the heir apparent, and the earl took his leave, in order to visit his bankers.

It was about half-past four in the afternoon when the nobleman returned to his mansion in Berkeley Square; and, having ascertained that the countess was alone in the drawing-room which she usually occupied in the winter season, he proceeded straight to that apartment.

“ My dearest Eleanor,” he said, rendering his voice as kind and his manner as cordial as he possibly could, “ I have

had occasion to call just now upon his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales — ”

Lady Desborough started; and it was only by a strong effort that she suppressed the ejaculation which rose to her lips.

“ And his Royal Highness,” continued the earl, who at the instant let his handkerchief fall and stooped to pick it up, so that Eleanor was relieved by the certainty that her emotion had escaped his observation, — “ and his Royal Highness will condescend to dine with us this evening. He has a little business to transact with me, of a pecuniary nature; and therefore his visit is strictly private, and he wishes to be alone with us, quite in a friendly way. The business to which I have alluded will not occupy many minutes, and can be transacted when we are over our wine together. I hope that the arrangement thus made will not interfere with any engagement previously made by you.”

“ I had no engagement for this evening,” answered the countess, now more than ever convinced that her husband was altogether ignorant of what had passed between herself and the Duchess of Devonshire on the preceding day, and that he was likewise unaware of the feeling which the prince entertained toward her; or else, she was assured, he would not have invited his Royal Highness to the house.

“ I need scarcely ask you to give such instructions, Eleanor,” resumed the earl, “ that the entertainment may be worthy of the illustrious guest who is to honour us with his presence; nor is it needful for me to intimate my desire that, although the banquet be of the most private character, it will become us to appear in full dress.”

“ I should have anticipated your wishes in those respects, Francis,” said the countess, her heart fluttering like an imprisoned bird that is frightened in its cage, and the colour coming and going on her cheeks a dozen times in a minute.

The earl then retired, and Eleanor, not daring to trust herself alone with her reflections, rang the bell and ordered the house-steward to wait upon her. That functionary soon made his appearance.

Having instructed the house-steward, Eleanor proceeded to her own chamber, where she issued the requisite commands to her two lady's-maids respecting her toilet; but when this was done, she found that she had still a couple of hours to

while away. She accordingly ordered the carriage, and paid a visit to her friend the Duchess of Devonshire, whom she confidentially acquainted with the circumstance that his Royal Highness was to dine at Desborough House in the evening. The conversation, therefore, dwelt entirely upon this subject, and as a demirep is invariably anxious to make her beautiful acquaintances or companions as bad as herself, the duchess said everything she could to inflame the imagination of Eleanor in respect to the prince; so that when the countess returned home to dress for dinner, her heart palpitated and her bosom heaved with pleasure at the thought of the delightful evening which she was to pass.

Precisely at eight o'clock his Royal Highness made his appearance, and was conducted to the drawing-room, where he was received by the Earl and Countess of Desborough.

Eleanor was gloriously handsome. The grave bashfulness which her nobly formed countenance wore imparted a queen-like air to her whole appearance, and contrasted charmingly with the radiance which the diamonds on her raven hair and the lustre of her splendid black eyes diffused around her. She seemed a magnificent vision too perfect for human beauty, a houri of Mohammed's paradise, invested with all the supernal fascination of that Elysian sphere.

And, in spite of herself, in spite of all the command which, prompted by her woman's pride and her natural virtue, she had resolved to exercise over her feelings, in spite, we say, of the immense efforts which she had made to counteract, or rather to subdue, the influence of that insidious language which the Duchess of Devonshire had poured into her ears, her bright eyes grew brighter beneath the impassioned gaze which the prince riveted upon her, and her hand trembled in his own, as he took it with apparent respect, but in reality pressed it gently, and the half-revealed bosom to which his looks then wandered, and where they settled gloatingly, heaved to the sigh of pleasure which she could not control.

She remembered not the insolent threat to which the royal voluptuary had dared give utterance on leaving her the last time she had seen him; she thought only that he was the strikingly handsome man the Duchess of Devonshire had loved to paint him in glowing terms, and the consciousness that she was blushing made her blush all the more deeply, while the flood of light that poured into her swimming eyes

dazzled and almost bewildered the prince as he met the glance which flashed upon him from those brilliant orbs.

All these feelings and emotions and variations of countenance, which would occupy a whole chapter in order to detail them fully, passed during the few seconds that his Royal Highness held the fair soft hand of that charming lady in his own; then, as she resumed her seat upon the sofa whence she had risen to welcome him, he placed himself by her side, and began to converse in that melodious yet manly voice which possessed so irresistible a sweetness for the fair sex.

Several minutes elapsed ere the countess could so far compose her thoughts and regain her self-possession as to take part in the discourse, which her husband, however, sustained with all the spirit of a fine intellect and an elegant taste; and in a short time a domestic entered to announce that dinner was served up.

The prince gave his arm to Lady Desborough; and as they descended the stairs she felt that he pressed that arm gently with his own, but not in a manner which could have given offence, or been interpreted otherwise than as accidental, even if she had possessed courage and self-command enough at the moment to resent that silent evidence of his passion.

The table, although only laid with three covers, would have presented a superb spectacle to any one unaccustomed to such magnificence. It groaned beneath the burden of the costliest gold plate, which shone brilliantly in the lustre of the chandelier suspended to the ceiling, and the light of which was reflected in numerous mirrors.

The earl appeared to be in excellent spirits; and even when his Royal Highness, carried away by the enthusiasm of his feelings, looked and spoke more tenderly with regard to the countess than a jealous husband would have admired, and when she, influenced by the same irresistible emotions, gave answers in a voice of silver tremulousness and blushed beneath the rapturous glances thrown upon her, the nobleman continued to discourse with an increased gaiety, as if, beholding nothing amiss, he abandoned himself to the pleasure of the evening.

The various courses were disposed of, and at length the dessert was placed upon the table. Shortly afterward the

countess rose to withdraw; and the prince hastened to open the door for her, no servants being then in the apartment.

She bowed in acknowledgment of this honour; and as she passed out of the room, with that graceful carriage of the arching neck and sloping shoulders for which she was so eminently distinguished, the prince said, in a low and hurried whisper, "Angelic being! I adore you!"

Then, as she crossed the threshold, he beheld the rich blood mantling up over that neck and those shoulders; and he returned to his seat with the inward conviction that he had already gone far toward the accomplishment of a complete triumph over her.

"Your position is a most enviable one, my dear friend," said his Royal Highness to the Earl of Desborough, as the claret jug passed between them. "You assuredly possess as your wife the handsomest and most amiable lady in England."

"Yes, Eleanor is indeed all that is most fascinating and adorable in female shape," returned the nobleman. "But, with the permission of your Royal Highness, we will now terminate that little transaction —"

"If you please, Desborough," answered the prince. "I really know not how to express my gratitude for this most unexpected and generous act on your part. But whenever the time may come that this hand of mine shall be enabled to affix a signature to a document in order to make it law, your earldom shall be changed into a marquissate, which is not far removed from the dukedom that shall speedily follow after."

"Your Royal Highness will only afflict me by the promise of reward," said the nobleman.

"I am aware that the deed is one of pure friendship on your part," hastily returned the prince; "nevertheless I should be wanting in gratitude did I not express my inclination, although at present utterly deficient in the power, to make a suitable acknowledgment of the great service you are rendering me."

While the heir apparent was thus delivering himself of frothy phrases, the hollowness of which was perfectly understood by the earl, who well knew the selfishness of his royal guest, twenty bank-notes for a thousand pounds each had been counted down on the table by the nobleman; and the

prince, amassing them all together as if they were a bundle of playbills, thrust them into his waistcoat pocket. Then, drawing forth a letter, he tore off a piece of the back, and with a gold pencil-case scribbled an I. O. U., which he handed to the earl.

Thus ended this little matter; and the prince continued to enjoy his wine, the nobleman keeping him company glass for glass. The conversation turned upon a variety of topics; but every now and then his Royal Highness could not prevent himself from saying something complimentary in respect to Lady Desborough, on which occasion the earl invariably directed the discourse as speedily as possible into another channel.

"I feel so comfortable and so entirely at home," said the prince, at last, "that I could almost wish I was to be your guest for a week, Desborough, instead of only for another hour," he added, looking at his watch. "In fact, I hate having to quit warm rooms and pass through the ordeal of a cold ride in a carriage."

"Your Royal Highness can easily avoid that ordeal," observed the nobleman. "A bedchamber is at your service beneath my roof; and, indeed," he exclaimed, hastily, "I should esteem myself highly honoured were your Royal Highness to condescend to sleep in my humble abode."

"Upon my honour," ejaculated the prince, as the thought flashed to his memory that the earl and countess did not sleep together, — a circumstance which we have already stated to be notorious, — "upon my honour, I am inclined to accept this invitation."

The nobleman walked to the window, drew aside the curtain, and looked forth upon the square.

"The night is bitterly cold," he said, returning to his seat; "there is a hard frost, and the pavement is quite white. It is enough to give any one his death merely to pass from the front door into a carriage."

"I hate the cold," cried the prince, shuddering at the idea of facing the bleak air. "Well, Desborough, I accept your invitation, and I will sleep here to-night."

The earl accordingly rang the bell, and ordered the servant who answered the summons to direct the chambermaids to prepare the best apartment, as his Royal Highness intended to pass the night at the mansion. The domestic

bowed and retired; and shortly afterward another lackey came to announce that coffee was served in the drawing-room.

Thither the heir apparent and the earl proceeded. Eleanor was seated on the sofa; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shone brilliantly, and there was an agitation, a feverish excitement in her manner, which she could not altogether conceal, much less subdue. The truth was, she had already heard from the servants that his Royal Highness intended to sleep at the mansion; and although there was nothing surprising in the circumstance of her husband having given such an invitation, yet the fact that the prince had accepted it — nay, she felt assured, must have thrown out some hint which elicited it — was too significant not to be understood by the lady.

No wonder, then, that her cheeks were flushed, that her eyes shone with a brilliancy that was wild and feverish; no wonder that her heart palpitated violently and she gave a sudden convulsive start, as the heir apparent placed himself by her side upon the sofa.

And he noticed her emotions, but divined not the true cause; his licentious, profligate, and demoralized nature led him to mistake the results of that severe internal wrestling for the evidences of a passion as heated, as inflamed, and as longing as his own. The earl, having thrown one rapid glance upon his wife, examined some new China ornaments which had that day been placed upon the mantelpiece. It was therefore clear to Eleanor that he either did not perceive anything strange in her appearance, or that if he did, it engendered no unpleasant suspicion in his mind.

Relieved and consoled by the circumstance that her excitement had thus again escaped the observation of her husband, and summoning all her fortitude to her aid, the Countess of Desborough assumed a composure, almost verging to a gaiety, which she did not entirely feel.

The coffee was handed around, the prince and the earl each took a small glass of exquisite liqueur, and the conversation was progressing in the same brilliant style as before, when his Royal Highness, in quoting a line of poetry, attributed it to the wrong author. Eleanor corrected him, but he declared that he was right. Thereupon the earl, starting from his seat, volunteered to fetch from the library a volume which would set the matter at rest; and he left the room.

But scarcely had the door closed behind him when the prince, seizing the hands of the countess, pressed them to his lips, covering them with kisses.

"Oh, you are determined to ruin me, body and soul!" murmured Eleanor, allowing her head to droop upon his shoulder, so that her hair mingled with his and her soft warm cheek lay against his own.

"Ruin you, my angel!" cried the prince, throwing his arms about her neck and straining her to his bosom; "I would die to promote your happiness! Oh, Eleanor, dearest Eleanor, I love, I adore you; drive me not to despair!"

And, unwinding his arms, he raised her head with his hands, and imprinted a thousand kisses upon her lips, burning kisses, which she returned, yes, she returned, for she was now borne headlong on the torrent of voluptuous feelings into which her fate appeared to plunge her.

"Dearest, dearest Eleanor!" whispered the prince, "you cannot fail to suspect wherefore I have remained here to-night. Again, therefore, I say, do not drive me to despair. Murmur in my ears a single word, an instruction to guide me to your chamber —"

And once more he strained her to his breast, once more he covered her charming, blushing, burning countenance with kisses; and, in the delirium of the moment, in the intoxication of ineffable feelings, in the whirl of all the tenderest emotions which woman's heart can know, the yielding Eleanor did murmur the few words of instruction which her daring companion craved.

Then, tearing herself from his embrace, she smoothed her hair and her dress, and strove to tranquillize her sensations and compose her features ere her husband returned to the room.

Fortunately on her account, several minutes yet elapsed before he made his appearance; otherwise he could not have failed to observe the thrilling excitement which possessed his wife, and whence she found it so difficult to recover.

Apologizing for his prolonged absence on the ground that he could not immediately find the book which he sought, the Earl of Desborough opened the volume he carried in his hand; and the Prince of Wales was compelled to acknowledge that he was wrong in his opinion and that the countess was right.

This point being settled, the conversation was pursued until near twelve, when Eleanor rose to withdraw. The prince took her hand; and, as he pressed it warmly but rapidly, he darted upon her a glance so full of meaning that she was forced to turn away immediately in order to conceal the burning blush which that look called up to her features.

The moment the countess had quitted the room, a deep and sudden sadness fell upon the earl, a sadness so profound, so strange, so irresistible, that the heir apparent could not help observing it. The nobleman complained that indisposition had thus abruptly seized on him; and, endeavouring to smile, he declared it to be nothing, a mere trifle, and already passing away. But that smile, oh, it was so ghastly, so deathlike, so positively hideous, that the prince was alarmed; and, imagining that the earl was about to faint, he rushed toward the bell.

Lord Desborough started up, caught the hand of his Royal Highness just as it touched the bell-rope, and exclaimed, "No, no, I am better now, I assure you that I am! But there are moments when this sudden indisposition, to which I am subject, seizes upon me with excruciating agonies."

The earl immediately rallied; and the prince was fully satisfied with the explanation which had been given. They remained conversing together for a few minutes longer; and then Lord Desborough in person conducted his Royal Highness to the chamber prepared for him.

The chandeliers were extinguished in the dining and drawing rooms; one by one, but in quick succession, the domestics ascended to their rooms; one by one also the lights disappeared from the windows of their respective chambers; and in a short time a profound silence reigned throughout the spacious mansion.

The church clocks were proclaiming the hour of one, when the door of the prince's apartment was opened slowly and cautiously, and his Royal Highness stole forth into the passage, where a lamp was burning.

But scarcely had he crossed the threshold, when an ejaculation of surprise fell upon his ears; and, to his horror and dismay, he found himself face to face with the Magsman!

CHAPTER XII

THE PRINCE AND THE MAGSMAN

ROOTED to the spot, paralyzed, as it were, transfixed by the varied feelings which the sudden apparition of this ruffian conjured up in his mind all in a moment, the heir apparent could not utter a word, but stood gazing in speechless terror and surprise on the hangdog countenance which, once seen, could never be forgotten.

"Well, I'm blowed if this isn't the rummest lark I ever knew in my life!" said the Magsman, at length; for, well aware that the prince would not venture to alarm the house and give him into custody, he was as free and independent as possible.

"For heaven's sake, come this way!" whispered his Royal Highness, now recovering the powers of speech, and uttering these words in a voice of mingled entreaty and command.

The Magsman accordingly followed the prince into the bedchamber, the door of which his Royal Highness carefully closed.

Scarcely, however, had that door shut, when the Countess of Desborough came airily and lightly down the passage, but with trembling limbs, a countenance ghastly pale, and a bosom upheaved with the suspended breath. For she had left her own door ajar, she had heard that of the prince open, in spite of the caution which he observed, then she had heard the ejaculation of surprise which had fallen from the Magsman's lips, but which her fancy, influenced by the sudden terror that seized upon it, tortured into an exclamation of rage. Next came the sounds of whispering voices, and, lastly, the door of the heir apparent's chamber closed again. She looked forth into the passage: no one was there. Her

fears rose to an intolerable height. She felt convinced that her husband, suspecting the understanding into which the prince had drawn her, had watched in the passage, had intercepted his Royal Highness as he was about to seek her apartment, and had followed him into his own chamber, either to cover him with reproaches, or perhaps for some more desperate purpose. For Eleanor had heard of duels fought across tables by persons holding handkerchiefs between them so that there should be no flinching and no retreat without the imputation of cowardice; she had also read of injured husbands taking the law in their own hands in a very summary manner, and shooting without remorse those adventurous gallants who had either debauched their wives or endeavoured to seduce them; and, knowing the high feelings and exalted sentiments which her husband entertained, she was struck with the appalling idea that he would not hesitate to wreak his vengeance on his treacherous guest, all prince and heir apparent though he were.

Quick as lightning did this train of reflections sweep across the mind of the unhappy lady, convulsing her whole form with anguish, blanching her cheeks, and suspending her very breath; and, under the influence of that fearful consternation, did she hurry along the passage, step noiselessly up to the door of the prince's chamber, apply her ear to the keyhole, and listen with the attention of an awful interest to what was taking place within.

But her feelings, so tensely wrung, so excruciatingly tried, speedily experienced a boundless relief in one sense, although only to undergo a painful transition into a state of ineffable wonderment, indignation, and deep humiliation.

Let us, however, describe the scene that took place in the chamber at the door of which the noble, elegant, and handsome Countess of Desborough was playing the part of eaves-dropper.

"What are you doing in this house?" demanded the prince, after a long hesitation how he should address the ferocious ruffian who, leaning against the bedpost, surveyed him with cool defiance.

"I suppose I've just as much right to ask you the same question," was the insolent response, "seeing that it's no more your house than it is mine."

"Do you forget who I am, sirrah?" exclaimed the prince,

the words hissing through his set teeth, for he was quivering with a rage that was all the more furious because of its utter impotency.

"Well, I can't say that I do," answered the Magsman. "You're the heir to the throne, and a precious rum heir you are, too. But it seems that you forget who I am, and so I'll just tell you. My name's Joseph Warren, — I don't Esquire myself, you see, — better known by intimate friends as Joe the Magsman. My wife is that dear soul who now passes in the fine world as Mrs. Brace, and whom you've done me the honour to make your mistress. Yes, and I haven't the slightest doubt that she's your go-between, and pander, and procuress, and everything else good and agreeable. Lord bless ye! d'ye think I can't read the secret of that fine establishment she keeps, and all those pretty girls that she has about her? But why do you stand looking at me in that savage style? I'm only telling you the truth. By the bye, I must thank your Royal Highness for the five hundred guineas you sent me three or four weeks ago through my wife — "

"Wretch! will you make an end of this hideous bantering?" cried the prince, bewildered and enraged to a degree that amounted to positive anguish.

"You don't appear to have anything to say for yourself," returned the villain, in a jeering tone, "and therefore I must speak for you. It wouldn't be genteel on my part to treat your Royal Highness with contemptuous silence."

"Again I demand, what are you doing in this house?" exclaimed the prince, heedless of the fellow's observations.

"And on my side I ask, what are you doing in that sneaking way in the passage?" retorted the Magsman. "But come, let us be candid with each other. You are the prince of all the rakes and demireps at the West End, and I'm the prince of all the buzgloaks, prigs, cracksmen, and flash coves elsewhere. So we meet on equal ground, you see. Well, then, let's have no nonsense between us. I'm here to rob the house, and you were going to creep along the passage to some expectant fair one's bedchamber, — as likely as not the lady of the mansion herself, for you're quite capable of it."

"My God! what shall I do with this wretch?" exclaimed the prince, in a tone of despair. "Villain," he immediately

afterward exclaimed, "you have escaped from Newgate, and one word will alarm the house and send you back to your old quarters."

"Quite true, prince of profligates," responded the Magsman; "but that one word you don't dare to utter."

"What do you require? What can I do to persuade you to depart forthwith?" demanded the heir apparent, goaded to desperation by the idea that the charming Eleanor was expecting him; for he little thought that she was so near at hand, and listening in horrified amazement and speechless indignation to every word that thus passed between himself and the Magsman.

"What do I require? What can you do to persuade me to depart?" repeated the ruffian. "Why, I'll tell you in a very few words. I've two pals with me, who're waiting very quietly down in the front kitchen till I go back to them after this little reconnoitre that I was taking of the house when I ran against you. Make it worth our while to bundle off at once, and I can assure you we shall be much better satisfied to finger some hard cash than run a risk of being seen going out with a parcel containing plate and such like little matters."

"Then you have two companions with you?" said the prince, exerting all his moral powers to master the rage, vexation, and bitter annoyance which this scene caused him to experience.

"Yes, and they'll agree to any bargain I make with you," replied the Magsman, who saw all along that he had the game in his own hands.

"Now, listen, one word will settle this affair," resumed his Royal Highness, in feverish haste. "Five hundred guineas shall be sent to you to-morrow at any place you choose to appoint —"

"That will do," interrupted the Magsman. "I know I can rely on your word — because you don't dare break it with me. One of my friends down-stairs will call at Carlton House to-morrow at midday, and ask if there's any letter for Mr. Smith. He's a genteel chap, — Dick the Trumper, — and he'll dress up swell for the occasion."

"Let that be the understanding," said the prince. "And now you will undertake to depart —"

"Yes, me and my two pals. I won't waste time by

introducing them to you, although they'd be charmed to make your acquaintance. But we'll be off, and, what's more, the people of the house sha'n't suspect to-morrow morning that the place has been entered during the night. It was fortunate that the kitchen window was left unfastened, and so there was no cutting out of panes of glass, or any need to use the jimmy. Good-bye, illustrious prince; and now you may be off to Lady Desborough's bed, if it was her chamber that you was going to."

With this coarse peroration, the volubility of which his Royal Highness did not dare interrupt, for fear of offending the Magsman and producing that disturbance in the house which he had been so anxious to avoid, the formidable ruffian stole gently out of the apartment; but the slight creaking which the door made on being opened drowned the noise of another door which closed at the same moment at the end of the passage.

His Royal Highness drank a deep draught of water to cool his parched throat, the instant that he found himself alone. He then sank into an armchair near the fire that was now smouldering in the grate, and endeavoured to compose his countenance and settle his thoughts.

By degrees he began to congratulate himself on having avoided a disturbance and exposure in the mansion, notwithstanding that this result had been accomplished at the expense of so much humiliation and by the endurance of such cutting insolence; and, having succeeded in tranquilizing his mind, he resolved to proceed to the chamber of the countess.

Cautiously did he emerge a second time from his apartment, stealthily did he tread along the passage, and in a few moments he reached the door of the room where he hoped to reap a rich reward for the annoyances he had so recently experienced.

But that door was fastened. He knocked gently; there was no response. He knocked again; still all was silent. He listened; no one moved within. Could he have mistaken the chamber? Impossible, for it was the last in the passage, on the left hand. A third time he knocked; and now a light step was heard approaching that door. It was about to be opened; he was already standing on the threshold of paradise! The blood boiled in his veins with the excitement of

passion deeply stirred, his heart palpitated violently. Glorious recollections of all the transcendent charms of the countess swept through his memory in a moment. She was coming, and he was about to be happy.

"Who is it?" demanded her soft and silvery voice, but, as the prince fancied, somewhat abruptly.

"'Tis I, my angel, your adorer!" he whispered.

"Then I command your Royal Highness to retire to your own chamber," was the stern and imperious response.

And he heard her retreat with a rapid step from the door.

For a few instants he stood stupefied, amazed, astounded; then all the indignation of his haughty soul and all the pride of his princely rank asserting their empire, he turned away, disdaining to implore a syllable of explanation.

At an early hour he rose from a sleepless couch, and immediately ordered his carriage. A few minutes afterward the Earl of Desborough made his appearance, and begged his Royal Highness to remain and partake of the breakfast which was already served up. But the prince declined in terms so positive as to be almost rude; and it was even with a certain degree of coldness, which he could not master, that he took a hasty leave of the nobleman.

The instant that they had thus separated, a glow of indescribable pleasure suffused itself over the countenance of the Earl of Desborough; and hurrying to his own chamber, he threw himself on a seat, weeping for very joy.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CONDEMNED SERMON — THE EXECUTION

It was Sunday morning, and the chapel in Newgate prison afforded a scene of deep and dreadful interest.

The galleries, respectively allotted to the males and females, were filled with prisoners, who presented a somewhat more cleanly appearance than on the occasion of Mrs. Brace's visit to the establishment; for the threat which was invariably held out on the Sabbath, of stopping the roast beef of those who did not wash for chapel, had produced the desired effect.

In the large circular pew, in the middle of the place of worship, Martin and Ramsey were seated. Soper, armed with his keys, kept watch upon them; but this precaution was unnecessary, for escape was impossible.

Consistently with the barbarian cruelty which characterized all the proceedings of what was termed "justice," and suitable with all the law's demands and exigencies, in the time of that detestable monarch, George III, the black coffins intended for the two criminals were placed at their feet, inside the enclosure.

The adjacent pews were filled with elegantly dressed ladies, some from the City, and others from the West End, but all attracted thither to listen to the Condemned Sermon, and see the doomed men who were to be hanged on the following morning.

Oh, talk not of the vitiated taste and the morbid curiosity which influence the multitudes that flock to places of public execution; for if rags and tatters go thither, silks and satins were ever wont to repair to the chapel of Newgate to hear the funeral exhortation of the ordinary, until the proceeding amounted to a scandal and a shame which rang throughout

Europe. Then the authorities interposed and a salutary prohibition was the result.

But on the occasion of which we are writing, — in those “good old times” which the people’s oppressors love to prate about, — the Sabbath preceding the day of public strangulation was invested with all possible horrors for the two condemned wretches, and with all possible entertainment for the well-dressed gentlemen and elegantly attired ladies who had been fortunate enough to obtain tickets of admission.

Separated from all the rest, rendered most painfully conspicuous, enclosed in that circular pew, Martin and Ramsey were enduring the damnable tortures of a moral Inquisition, preparatory to the infernal crowning catastrophe.

If they raised their eyes, they beheld a bigoted, dogmatic, and superstitious ordinary, endeavouring to establish a reputation for pulpit eloquence at the expense of their feelings, already so acutely wrung; if they looked around them, they saw beauteous faces gazing intently upon them, and bright eyes watching every movement of their muscles with the keenest curiosity; and if they glanced downward, their vision was appalled by those black objects of sinister shape which stood at their feet.

It was horrible, horrible!

And yet those two doomed men were expected to compose their thoughts to prayer, and fix their ideas only and wholly upon the eternity into which they were soon to be hurried.

But, Almighty God! how was this possible? Turn whichever way they would, their eyes encountered something to recall their imaginations most painfully, most agonizingly to the affairs of this world, and to the beings who render it a scene of barbarism, wretchedness, and oppression.

Oh, would it not have been better far to allow those men, already hovering between two spheres, that of mortality and that of eternity, would it not have been more humane, more just, more consistent with true religious feeling, to leave them each in his solitary cell, and thither send the minister of Christ to console, to soothe, to pray, and to promise?

Wherefore permit those curious spectators to flock thither on such an occasion? Why convert the temple of worship into a stage for the representation of a melodrama of thrill-

ing interest? Why place the emblems of the grave at the feet of the doomed wretches?

Because all these proceedings were consistent with the despotic times and sanguinary laws of George III, that monarch who was made up of madness, bigotry, deception, and bloody-mindedness; because everything in that age was done with a view to strike terror into the public mind, and thereby check civilization, freedom, and progress; and because our legislators and rulers invariably support those systems of cruelty, barbarism, tyranny, superstition, and wrong which the millions are enlightened enough to denounce, and humane enough to shudder at.

In a retired corner of the chapel, George Woodfall, that young and interesting artist who has already been introduced to our readers, was seated. He was led thither by no sentiment of morbid curiosity; his nature was above such an ignominious feeling. But he had been sent by his griping old master, the greedy, avaricious picture-dealer, to study the countenance of Philip Ramsey, in order to transfer it to canvas at his leisure. For so much interest had attached itself to the trial of the forgers, and so highly had the press spoken of the handsome appearance and elegant manners of the younger convict, that Mr. Shrubsole felt assured of obtaining a speedy sale and a good price for the portrait of this individual.

The reverend ordinary droned through a long and clumsily composed sermon, by the details of which he had hoped to produce a thrilling effect upon his auditory; and if he could only succeed in wringing tears from the two condemned culprits, oh, what a grand proof of his eloquence would that be, and what a telling circumstance it would be to have reported in the newspapers the following morning!

One or two of the elegant ladies who were assembled there thought it was necessary to squeeze out a few tears; and Mr. Soper pursed up his mouth and endeavoured to look as sentimental as possible.

In the gallery, amongst the male prisoners, were the Big Beggarman and Briggs, to whose case the ordinary likewise alluded, exhorting them, and other convicts, to take warning from the dreadful spectacle presented to their view by the occupants of the circular enclosure. This advice did not, however, seem to produce any salutary effect; for the Big

Beggarman, stooping his head, whispered some very coarse remark to his fellow convict Briggs, who responded in an equally irreverent manner.

The service was concluded; the prisoners, male and female, were marched back to their wards; and the two doomed men were recondigned each to his condemned cell. The congregation dispersed; and the ordinary accepted an invitation to lunch with the governor of Newgate, well knowing that in addition to such substantial or cheering comforts as cold pigeon pie, bottled stout, and cherry brandy, he should receive the more frothy, but scarcely less welcome, compliments which his sermon was expressly fabricated to elicit.

Damp, raw, and misty broke the fatal Monday morning; and immense crowds were collected in the Old Bailey, and in every avenue leading thither.

At the debtors' door of Newgate stood the terrible machine, the huge platform, with its black beams towering high above the heads of the assembled masses.

The bell of St. Sepulchre, which had already begun to toll, appeared to have a gloomier sound than usual, as its iron tongue struck deep and solemn on the ear; more sombre than ever frowned the solid masonry of Newgate upon the gathered multitudes; and the very air seemed to have acquired a more searching and penetrating chill.

Nevertheless, the crowds commenced their ribald jesting, practical jokes, and licentious conversation; for our precious rulers are either so besottedly ignorant or so wilfully criminal as to demoralize the people by means of these accursed exhibitions of public strangulation.

But suddenly a dead silence fell upon the vast mass of spectators; and all eyes were fixed, as if spellbound, upon the ominous scaffold.

Slowly came forth the funeral procession from the debtors' door. First the ordinary made his appearance, with open prayer-book in his hands, and reading the service for the dead; close behind followed the governor of Newgate; then Martin and Ramsey, both pinioned in the usual manner, ascended the steps of the platform, accompanied by the executioner; and, lastly, the sheriffs issued from the gaol.

The countenances of the doomed men were ghastly pale; but their lineaments were convulsed with no hideous work-

ings. Rigid, as if the cold hand of the Destroyer lay already upon them, were those features. No tears fell from their eyes: the appalling consternation which was upon them had frozen nature's relieving fountain at its very source. Their senses were enchained as if under the influence of a frightful dream. Stiffened with dread horror, they could scarcely drag their limbs up the steps to the sable platform, in the middle of which were marked the outlines of the trap-door that opened downward beneath the fatal cross-beam. Their brains were seared and their feelings were blasted as if with lightnings. There was a tingling in their ears as if evil spirits were whispering awful things; the incantation of a black despair was upon them. An awful terror had paralyzed all their faculties; it was a fearful stupefaction, combined with perfect consciousness of all that was passing, a species of nightmare which they could not shake off, and which held them dumb.

Placed beneath the fatal beam, there they stood transfixed, sustaining themselves on their legs by a kind of mechanical instinct, and not because they sought to meet their doom with firmness. The executioner fastened the ropes around their necks; and then, for the first time, they appeared to start from their automaton condition. For over the countenance of each did an indescribable passion of anguish pass; horror glared in their eyes, the spasmodic writhing which swept through their frames convulsed their features, and their ashy lips were suddenly compressed as if to keep down the cry of mortal agony that rose to the tips of their tongues.

But, in another moment, the white cotton caps were drawn over those countenances now really hideous, and the executioner, leaping down the steps, entered the vast wooden box which formed the pedestal to that ominous gibbet above.

The ordinary continued the funeral service. The multitudes, still maintaining a profound silence, kept their looks riveted on the scene of horrible interest and fearful attraction.

Down came the trap-door, down fell the two doomed men; but, oh, their fall was suddenly stopped short by the ropes to which they hung, and there they dangled in the air, dread spasms shooting through their frames, lightnings pouring up into their brain, their hands moving rapidly up and down with the convulsions of dying agony.

And as if the galvanism of that mortal anguish were sud-

denly wafted throughout the dense assemblage of spectators, a shudder swept over the entire mass; and, even with the most brutalized and degraded, it did them harm to contemplate this awful spectacle of public strangulation.

In a few minutes, however, this feeling and that impression appeared to have lost all their effect; for, so soon as the ordinary, the governor of Newgate, the executioner, and the sheriffs had reëntered the prison, the practical jokes, the obscene jests, the bonneting, and the larking began all over again, while hawkers bawled out, "The last dying speeches and confessions of Martin and Ramsey!"

And these printed lines were eagerly caught up by those who had a halfpenny to give for them, although the purchasers well knew that no dying speeches had been made at all, and had read the confessions in the newspapers of the preceding day. But then those narratives had a rough and rudely executed woodcut of a scaffold at the top, and this was the main attraction.

At nine o'clock the bodies were cut down and conveyed into the gaol, where it was understood that the corpse of Martin would be interred at midnight; but the remains of Ramsey had been claimed by some friends, who were desirous to bury them elsewhere.

The crowds dispersed, and all the public-houses in the neighbourhood were soon filled. The scaffold was rolled away into the press-yard of Newgate, the ordinary and the sheriffs sat down to an excellent breakfast with the governor, and thus ended the accursed scene.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PORTRAIT AND THE DREAM

It was about seven o'clock in the evening of that day on which Martin and Ramsey were executed; and we again find Mrs. Brace seated alone in her excellently furnished parlour. But a visitor was speedily announced, and this was the Prince of Wales.

"My dear Fanny," he said, flinging himself upon a seat as soon as he had removed his cloak, "I have been anxious to see you for three or four days past, but I could not possibly find an opportunity. Octavia will, however, be here presently; and therefore I resolved to have half an hour's chat with you before her arrival."

"She believes, then, that you have just returned to town?" remarked Mrs. Brace, inquiringly.

"Yes; I longed to see the sweet girl again, and I wrote her a note this morning, stating that I came back to London last night, and that I hoped she would bless me with an interview here this evening. She is sure to keep the appointment," added his Royal Highness.

"And pray, have you ever thought how this amour is to end?" asked the milliner, who had lately begun to reflect that if an explosion should take place in that respect, her own establishment would be ruined. "To tell you the truth," she continued, "I look upon it as far more serious than any other love-affair in which you were ever engaged, — at least, within my knowledge. For here is a young creature, tender and confiding, and who believes you to be plain Mr. Harley, with a country-seat somewhere, and living at a hotel when in town; and it must happen, sooner or later, that accident will reveal to her your real rank. Then, in the first feeling of anguish, she will betray all — everything —"

"My dear Fanny," interrupted the prince, "I know all that you would say; and your alarms are not without foundation. Within the last few days I have myself reflected very seriously on this matter. In the first flush of that ardent passion with which the dear girl inspired me, all other considerations were absorbed; but, awaking as if from a dream, I now perceive all the perils which are likely to ensue. To reveal myself to her, were impossible; to continue with the constant risk that she may discover who I am, is fraught with danger."

"And if this amour should lead to other consequences?" said Mrs. Brace; "if Octavia should find herself in the way to become a mother —"

"I know not how to act — I am bewildered!" exclaimed the prince, in a tone of deep vexation. "But we will talk over this matter on a future occasion. It was relative to the Countess of Desborough that I wished to speak particularly to you now."

"And it was likewise concerning her ladyship that I was anxious to see you," said Mrs. Brace; "for I felt assured there was something wrong in that quarter."

"Ah! how could you possibly have formed such a conjecture?" demanded the prince.

"Because, on the very day after I called upon her ladyship, and the particulars of which interview I sent you in a hastily written note on my return home, one of her servants came with an imperative command that my account should be sent to her ladyship without delay. So urgent was the message, that I instantaneously complied; and in the course of that very same afternoon the sum due to me was brought by the same domestic. At the bottom of the bill were these words: 'The Countess of Desborough will not in future trouble Mrs. Brace to wait upon her, as hitherto, with the newest fashions.' This intimation," added the milliner, "is not be misunderstood: it is a withdrawal of her ladyship's custom from my house."

"She must have overheard my conversation with your husband," said the prince.

"Conversation! — husband!" ejaculated Mrs. Brace, starting, and turning very pale.

"I will explain myself," said the prince.

He then related all those adventures in connection with

his visit to Desborough House which are already known to the reader, merely suppressing the fact that the earl had lent him twenty thousand pounds. But he mentioned how his lordship had invited him to dinner, how Eleanor had promised to admit him to her chamber, how he had encountered the Magsman, and how her ladyship's door was afterward fastened against him.

"And did you yield to the extortion of that villain?" inquired Mrs. Brace, deeply humiliated at the thought that her own husband should thus have insulted the prince so grossly a second time.

"What could I do?" exclaimed his Royal Highness. "It was impossible for me to risk persecution and exposure at the hands of that man, who already knows too much concerning me," he continued; "and therefore the money was paid in the way he had stipulated. That the countess must have left her chamber, listening at my door, and overheard everything which took place between me and that scoundrel, is very evident. Hence her refusal to keep her promise and admit me to her room; hence also the summary manner in which she has withdrawn her custom from you. For that ruffian, whom I will not call your husband, said enough to make her ladyship understand that you and I were very intimately connected, and that all you had said to her in the morning was entirely on my behalf."

"You have therefore abandoned all hopes in that quarter?" said Mrs. Brace, interrogatively.

"Far from it!" exclaimed the prince. "Those burning kisses which I gave and which were returned with equal ardour, those delicious toyings and that voluptuous dalliance in which I revelled for a few moments, during her husband's absence from the room, the deep hold which this passion has taken of my heart, and a certain sentiment of pride prompting me to triumph over the coy and haughty beauty, — all these motives, my dear Fanny, prevent me from abandoning my designs regarding the lovely countess. I am maddened by the contemplation of her image; my veins boil with the fervour of my desires. And her own nature is so warm, so impassioned, so glowing, that it must be paradise to repose in her arms. By heaven!" ejaculated the prince, with almost a wild emphasis, "she shall be mine, by fair means or foul."

"And it is for this purpose that you have sought my advice?" asked the milliner.

"Assuredly so," responded his Royal Highness. "Place all your powers of invention upon the rack, torture your imagination to the extreme, but fail not to devise some project which shall give that delicious creature to my arms."

"For the life of me, I can think of nothing," exclaimed Mrs. Brace. "Unless, indeed —"

"Unless what?" demanded the prince, impatiently.

"Unless actual violence be resorted to, or some deeply laid stratagem," returned the milliner.

"Be it either, I hardly care which," added the impassionate George, "so long as we succeed. But I do not ask you to make up your mind at once; the matter is a serious one, and requires consideration."

"In the course of a day or two I shall devise some project," said Mrs. Brace.

At this moment Harriet entered the room, to announce that Miss Clarendon had arrived.

The prince sprang from his seat, and hastened to the apartment where the beautiful girl was waiting for him.

She flew into his arms; and tears of joy streamed down her blushing cheeks as she returned the ardent kisses which he imprinted on her moist red lips. Then she gazed with an expression of the most enthusiastic affection and admiration on the fine countenance of her seducer; and a passionate love shone in the splendid blue eyes of this charming creature.

Having compelled her to lay aside her bonnet and scarf, and seating himself by her side on a sofa, with his left arm encircling her waist and his right hand locked in hers, the prince said, "To me, dearest Octavia, it has appeared an age since last we met."

"And to me also," murmured the lovely girl.

"Never did you seem so radiantly beautiful as you are this evening, my Octavia," exclaimed the prince, at that moment forgetting the Countess of Desborough as completely as if there were no such being in existence.

"And never did you appear in my eyes so eminently handsome," was the soft response. "But even though we have been separated for an entire age, during your absence in the country," continued the charming Octavia, her eyes and countenance becoming overpoweringly brilliant in light

and beauty as a glow of impassioned animation flooded her exquisite features, "I have nevertheless had something to console me," she added, with the most winning archness.

"Indeed!" cried the prince, straining her affectionately to his bosom.

"Yes, your portrait," said Octavia, with the same tone and manner of playful slyness.

"My portrait!" repeated his Royal Highness.

"It is as I tell you," continued Miss Clarendon. "A few days ago, my sister and myself visited a print-shop to purchase some drawings; and there we saw a portrait which had just been issued of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

"Ah!" ejaculated her lover, fixing his eyes upon her countenance in order to read in its expression whether she entertained any suspicion of his identity with the heir apparent to the English throne.

"Yes," she resumed, with an artlessness of manner that relieved all his fears on that head in a moment, "the portrait of the prince caught my view, and I was instantly struck by the extraordinary resemblance which it bore to you. Pauline made the same remark, and I purchased it. Oh, my dearest George, I can assure you that ever since that day I have passed hours at a time in gazing upon the noble countenance delineated on that paper; and the longer I have dwelt on it, the more wonderful has the likeness appeared. The same high and intellectual forehead, the same hair, the same facial outline, even to the very expression of the features —"

"You flatter me too highly, charming girl, in thus comparing me to the prince," said his Royal Highness, suddenly silencing her with a rapturous kiss.

"Oh, far from it!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms about his neck; and retaining her countenance at a short distance from his own, she surveyed him with renewed earnestness and impassioned attention. "Is it not strange that the resemblance should be so perfect in all its details?"

"There are instances of extraordinary likenesses of this kind, my love," answered the prince. "You have doubtless read in the newspapers the recent romantic trial in which Sir Richard Stamford bore a part; and you may remember that this gentleman is represented as strikingly resembling the royal family."

"Yes, I recollect," said Octavia. "But, although I have never seen him, I do not think for a moment that he can bear so perfect a likeness to the prince as yourself. And now, my beloved George, tell me when you intend to seek an introduction to my father, and visit us in Cavendish Square. Oh, I implore you to interpose no unnecessary delay in taking that step. There are times — pardon me for speaking thus frankly — when I tremble from head to foot lest my father should discover the secret of my love, our stolen interviews —"

"Have patience, sweet Octavia, for a few weeks longer," said the prince; "and then —"

"A few weeks!" she repeated, in a tone of almost anguished disappointment. "Oh, wherefore this long interval —"

"It is absolutely necessary that I should settle certain family affairs, my beloved Octavia," interrupted his Royal Highness, "before I can present myself at your abode. Be assured, however, that no further delay shall take place —"

"But, in the meantime, what is to prevent you forming the acquaintance of my father?" asked Octavia, an indistinct doubt of her lover's sincerity, a doubt faint as the hue which the red rose-leaf throws upon the marble, agitating her mind for a moment, but softly and slightly, as the flower waves in the still air. Then, ashamed and angry at herself for having allowed such a suspicion to flash across her mind, even for an instant, she hastened to observe, "I believe all you tell me, dearest George. I have the utmost confidence in your love and in your honour; but, oh, you will render me completely happy, you will make me the most joyous being on the face of the earth, if you will only grant my request and seek an introduction to my father."

The prince was troubled by these words, in which there was an appealing earnestness, showing that Octavia was accustomed to reflect upon the delay which he interposed in becoming a visitor at Mr. Clarendon's dwelling upon the usual terms of acquaintanceship prior to assuming the more decisive part of a suitor for the hand of that gentleman's elder daughter; and when he coupled this anxiety on her side with the affair of the portrait, he dreaded lest the most trivial incident or the slightest casualty should lead to a discovery of his princely rank.

"You are silent, my beloved; you appear to be vexed with me for having spoken so frankly on a subject which nearly and closely concerns my happiness," exclaimed Octavia, with a sweetness of tone and manner that was charmingly seductive though unaffectedly natural. "Oh, I am certain that you cannot be offended with me, George. Remember that I have refused you no proof of my ardent and eternal affection; and you surely will not deny me this easily accomplished testimony of your own. You say that you have family affairs to settle; but they cannot prevent you from forming new acquaintances, if you will. Even supposing that your relations should object to your union with me, they would not suspect that you entertained the idea of such an alliance from the simple fact of obtaining an introduction to our house. Besides, dear George, the time must come when you will accomplish your solemn vows, your sacred pledges —"

"Can you doubt it, my beloved?" exclaimed the prince, scarcely knowing how to reply to a series of arguments which were incontrovertible. "Do not question me for the present, I implore you. In a few weeks you will cease to have occasion for annoyance on this head. In love there must be a blind confidence, an implicit faith, a full reliance; or else it is not a sincere and deeply rooted affection."

"Do you for a moment doubt my love?" murmured Octavia, the tears starting forth upon her long lashes. "Oh, it were cruel, indeed, to suspect the intensity of that devotion, that worship which I experience toward you. For do you know, George, that if you were to prove faithless to me, I should go mad, or else I should end my days in suicide. I could not survive the loss of your love; it is the air which I breathe, it seems to have absorbed all other ties that bound me to existence ere I knew the happiness of thus loving and being beloved. And I will tell you what a strange, what a dreadful dream I had the other night; indeed, it was on the very night following the day on which I procured the portrait that I call yours. On retiring to my chamber, and after Pauline was asleep, I sat up for an hour contemplating that picture, and comparing all its lineaments with your own; for your image is so faithfully and accurately impressed upon my mind that I see you before me, even when we are separated, as plainly as I behold you now. Well, having

studied that portrait until its lips appeared to smile at me and its eyes to look love to mine, I retired to rest. Sleep came upon me; and then methought that I was seated with you in a delicious arbour. It was the spring-time; the blossoms fed the air with their fragrance, the heavens were of cloudless blue and stainlessly sunny, and the birds carolled in their verdant retreats. We sat gazing upon each other in silence, our looks speaking more eloquently than our words could have done. Oh, thus far the dream was Elysian; my soul was bathed in happiness ineffable. But suddenly a gorgeous train of nobles and brilliantly dressed ladies appeared in sight; and, starting from your seat, tearing yourself from my arms, you hurried toward the procession, as if to command that it should pass on without recognizing you. But a name was spoken by some voice, and that name was the Prince of Wales. The sickness of death came over me, and I fainted. When I returned to consciousness, I fancied that utter darkness had closed in around me. Rising from the cold ground to which I had fallen, I groped my way amidst densely interwoven shrubs and thickly growing trees, the dew from the foliage moistening all my garments and damping my hair, which I believed to be streaming wildly and dishevelled over my shoulders. Suddenly I saw a light in the distance; I advanced toward it. Every instant it grew stronger and stronger, until a glorious blaze of lustre flowed from the open portals of a church. Impelled by that strange influence which hurries us on in our dreams, and which, indeed, sometimes prompts us in our actions when we are awake, I entered the sacred edifice. With trembling steps, and an appalling presentiment of evil lying like a weight of lead upon my heart, I approached the altar, around which I beheld assembled that gorgeous train of nobles and ladies whom I had seen in the earlier portion of my vision. But one form stood out in proud contrast from all the rest; and that form was thine, my George. But scarcely had my eyes settled upon you, when the solemn voice of the clergyman bestowed the nuptial blessing upon yourself and a lady whose hand you held in your own. A rending shriek escaped my lips, and I awoke. Nor was that shriek a part of the dream, but a real expression of indescribable anguish; for Pauline had been awakened by it, and, seriously alarmed, she inquired what was the matter. I soothed her appre-

hensions on my account by telling her that I had experienced a horrible dream, the nature of which I did not unfold to her. For the remainder of the night my feverish brow pressed a sleepless pillow; and never, never was the dawn of morning more welcome. Oh, this dream has haunted me oftentimes since, yes, a hundred times during the few days which have elapsed since it occurred."

"But you put no faith in idle visions, my beloved?" said the prince, more profoundly troubled than before at the strange narrative which had come from Octavia's lips, and which he would have interrupted more than once during the recital had he not been enchained by the species of fearful and prophetic interest wherewith it was invested. "Such a dream is easily accounted for, dearest," he continued: "you had been gazing on a portrait in which you traced a resemblance to me; it was the predominant idea in your mind when sleep fell upon your eyes, and your imagination wreathed a host of wild and romantic fancies into the vivid and strongly coloured texture of a vision."

"Oh, I am well aware that this is the true mode to account for it," exclaimed Octavia, "but it was not the less painful at the time; and the frequent trains of melancholy thought which its remembrance engenders distress me occasionally more than I could possibly make you understand."

"Of what nature are those thoughts, my beloved?" inquired the prince, determined to probe the young lady's mind to the very bottom, since the discourse had turned on this subject; and, moreover, he felt that he was already standing on the verge of an abyss.

"You will only chide me if I give you the explanation you desire, dear George," said Octavia, casting a timid look upon her royal lover.

"No, on the contrary, I wish you to be frank and explicit, my angel," returned the prince; "for it is my duty and my desire to tranquillize all your misgivings," he added, insidiously.

"Misgivings! Oh, I have none when with you," cried the lovely creature, pressing her lips upon his cheek. "But you ask me for an explanation of those thoughts which my dream has left behind, and which steal upon me at times in spite of every effort which I make to throw them off. For, when alone, or if at all dispirited, I find myself giving

way to sad misgivings, akin to that vision, and which cause me infinite torture. I reflect that if you are indeed other than you have represented yourself, if the portrait should prove to be so perfect a resemblance of you, because you are its real original, and if I have surrendered up my heart, and what is more, my honour, to the heir apparent to the throne of these realms, oh, then madness or suicide would be the result. For innocence is a balm even to the aching heart; but that anodyne will not be mine. On occasions, my thoughts are continued in another strain; and, instead of foreseeing madness or suicide as the crowning catastrophe, it appears to me as if all my love would turn to the bitterest hate, and that I would even throw myself at the feet of the king and demand justice against his son, my seducer. But, when I succeed in arousing my mind from these most painful reveries, I am so ashamed, so vexed, so angry at having given way to speculations so wild and suspicions so injurious, my beloved George, to you, that I am thrown into a perfect fever of excitement; and the blood circulates like lightning in my veins, my ears tingle, my tongue grows parched, my temples throb, my eyeballs burn. And now you will pardon me, my George, for having thus frankly unbosomed myself to you; and you will cease to be astonished if I still urge my prayer that you will lose no time in obtaining from some mutual friend an introduction to my father."

"You know not how profoundly I am afflicted, my beloved Octavia," said the prince, with his most melting tone and soothing manner, "by all you have told me this evening. The idea that I can possibly be any other than your own George Harley, is, of course, too ridiculous to need any protestation on my part. But that you should give way to such desponding thoughts at one time, and to such maddening reflections at another, this it is that so deeply grieves me. Now, my adored girl," he exclaimed, in an impassioned tone, "I beseech you, by that love which you bear for me, by that love which I entertain for you, by all our past happiness and future hopes, Octavia, do I conjure you to place unlimited confidence in me. I ask but a delay of six weeks; at the end of that time I will give you such reasons for my conduct as shall make you regret that you even for an instant mistrusted my sincerity. What those reasons are I cannot, must not, will not at present explain —"

“ Oh, your anger would kill me! ” exclaimed the yielding and tender Octavia, flinging herself upon her lover’s breast and weeping profusely. “ Yes, I will grant the delay which you have demanded — My God! I have no alternative — And now kiss me, tell me that you are no longer chagrined with me; for, oh, your love has become so necessary to my happiness, it is a part of my very life.”

“ Yes, I will kiss away those tears, my angel,” said the prince, straining her in his arms.

CHAPTER XV

THE MILLINER'S PARLOUR

WE must now return to Mrs. Brace's parlour, into which Lord Florimel was introduced by Harriet, the lady's-maid, a few minutes after the Prince of Wales had quitted it to join the lovely Octavia in another apartment.

"This is a pleasure which I little expected, my dear Gabriel," exclaimed the milliner, "the promise you sent me in reply to my note having remained unfulfilled for several days."

"I wish to God the note had never been sent to me at all!" cried Florimel, throwing himself with an unfeigned air of vexation upon a seat.

"What can you mean?" demanded Mrs. Brace. "Was not the bearer a truly divine creature?"

"And it is precisely because a divine creature was the bearer of the letter that I am half-maddened by the result," returned Florimel.

"Indeed!" ejaculated the milliner, now recalling to mind the little incident which had occurred in respect to the charming daughters of Mr. Clarendon and Camilla Morton.

"I am driven to desperation," resumed Florimel. "Octavia and Pauline were passing my house when your beautiful messenger came out, and all kinds of detrimental suspicions have been the consequence. If you had sent an old hag of sixty, there would have been no harm; but to make that sylphlike creature the bearer of your note, a heavenly being who appears to be in mourning for the deaths her fine eyes have inflicted —"

"She is indeed angelic," observed Mrs. Brace.

"Angelic!" repeated Florimel; "I must admit that all possible ideas of female loveliness are realized and combined

in her person, my own Pauline being left out of the question. But Pauline is as cruel as she is beautiful. Only conceive my astonishment, my grief, my despair, when, a few hours after your messenger had called, and just as I was about to pay a visit to Mr. Clarendon's house in Cavendish Square, a note came from Pauline, upbraiding me with my perfidy, explaining the reasons of her anger, and begging that everything might be considered at an end with us."

"And can you not console yourself for the loss of Pauline by the possession of Camilla?" asked Mrs. Brace. "If so, I promise you that the sweet girl shall become your conquest —"

"I dare not think of it," interrupted Florimel, almost savagely. "And yet when I reflect that Pauline has not even condescended to notice the explanatory letters which I have sent her, and that she has refused to see me when I called —"

"This is a cruelty surpassing all I ever heard of," said Mrs. Brace. "It would bring the haughty beauty to her senses if you were to give her a rival in reality."

"I am so grieved, so vexed, that I know not how to act," exclaimed the young nobleman. "The truth is, as I have already assured you, that I love Pauline, worship, adore her —"

"But you are not to be made the butt of her caprices and whims," interrupted Mrs. Brace. "Come, my dear Gabriel, manifest an independent spirit."

"You seem most anxious that I should become the bidder in the market for this charming flower, this beauteous Camilla," cried Florimel, in a tone of impatience; and yet he had not the moral courage to put an end to the discourse, or fly away from the sphere of temptation. "But the truth is, my dear friend," he continued, hastily, "that young creature has only recently lost her parents, she is still in mourning for them, and it would be a scandal and a shame to wrong her. No, I could not do it, I could not do it!"

At this moment the door opened, and Camilla Morton entered the room, to make some inquiry of Mrs. Brace respecting a piece of work on which she was engaged; but, the instant she beheld that her mistress was not alone, she murmured a rapid apology for the intrusion, and was about to withdraw.

"Do not go away, my dear child," said the milliner, in that kind and motherly tone which she was in the habit of assuming toward her young ladies, especially to those who had not as yet fallen in the meshes of seduction. "This is Lord Florimel, that good nobleman to whom you took a letter for me the other day, and who has called to liquidate the demands which I had upon his extravagant cousin. Now, my love, what is it you want to know?"

Camilla advanced with modest timidity, holding in her hand the piece of work; and displaying it to her mistress, she put sundry queries, which Mrs. Brace took as long time to answer as possible. Indeed she elaborated her instructions so much that she succeeded in detaining the young girl upwards of five minutes in the room, during which interval Lord Florimel could not take his eyes off her. For her mourning garb rendered her so sweetly interesting and set off to such advantage the beauty of her complexion, that the nobleman felt all his good resolves thawing within him and all his grosser passions as rapidly excited.

When Camilla quitted the room, followed by the enraptured looks of Florimel, — she, herself, however, not observing the intentness of his gaze, — Mrs. Brace said, with one of her most fascinating and archest smiles, "Is she not perfect?"

"Ravishing!" exclaimed the young nobleman, unable to subdue his enthusiasm. "If I did not love Pauline, I could not love Camilla."

"And you will love her all the same," said the milliner. "Next Sunday evening you will sup with me; Camilla alone shall be present with us. In the meantime — for this is only Monday — I shall have leisure to insinuate into her mind all those little praises concerning you which praises produce so great an effect upon young persons."

"No, no, I will not promise — I will not come!" ejaculated Florimel.

"There can, at all events, be no harm in your passing an agreeable evening," urged Mrs. Brace.

"Well, well, I will think of it, I will let you know tomorrow," said Gabriel; and, hastily shaking the milliner's hand, he took an abrupt departure.

"That matter is as good as settled," murmured Mrs. Brace to herself as the door closed behind the retreating

form of the young nobleman. "Camilla will be worth a thousand guineas to me in the very first instance."

Scarcely had the unprincipled, selfish, heartless woman made this reflection, when Harriet again entered, ushering in Mrs. Lindley, the old midwife of Fore Street, Lambeth. The servant immediately withdrew; and the harridan paid her respects to Mrs. Brace, glancing, however, suspiciously around the room to assure herself, with her habitual caution, that no listener was near.

"What brings you hither, my good friend?" inquired Mrs. Brace.

"Hush! — not so loud; — walls have ears!" murmured the midwife, speaking in a low whisper, and placing a long, lean finger to her lip. "That dear girl, Caroline Walters —"

"Ah! what — already?" ejaculated the milliner, bending forward in an attitude of earnest attention.

"Hush — a miscarriage," said the old woman, who, having by this time put on her spectacles with the great circular glasses, fixed her small, dark, reptile-like eyes through them upon the countenance of Mrs. Brace. "Yes, a miscarriage —"

"Well, that is a matter for rejoicing," observed the milliner. "But how is she?"

"Somewhat excited, irritable, and nervous," was the answer. "When the babe was born, and the doctor pronounced it to be dead, she insisted on seeing it; and weak and suffering as she was, such a terrible expression swept over her countenance that if I were to live for a thousand years I could not forget it. But — hush! what noise was that?" demanded the midwife, with startled manner and in a hurried whisper.

"Nothing, nothing; a carriage in the street," returned the milliner. "But this expression of countenance —"

"Was of the darkest, most fiendlike malignity," added the old woman. "I could not have supposed that such a young creature was susceptible of such a hellish passion as that which alone could have produced such a look. But then, as she herself has told me, Spanish blood circulates in her veins."

"You surprise, grieve, alarm me," said Mrs. Brace. "But perhaps it was the effect of a sudden paroxysm of pain —"

"No, I can easily distinguish between physical anguish

and the workings of the mind," interrupted Mrs. Lindley. "So struck was I by the incident which I have mentioned that I determined to call and communicate it to you by word of mouth; otherwise I should have merely announced the accouchement of Miss Walters, by means of a letter. But believe me, my dear madam," added the midwife, impressively, "believe me, I say, that this young girl meditates some scheme of infernal vengeance against her seducer; and as such a proceeding might lead to an exposure of all the circumstances of the case, whatever they may be — "

"Yes, yes, I comprehend you," said Mrs. Brace, nervously; "and that exposure would perhaps involve the mention of my name in a manner extremely prejudicial to my establishment."

"That is precisely what I foresaw," observed the midwife, "and therefore I resolved to call and give you due warning of the vindictive sentiments which Miss Walters cherishes toward her seducer."

"I take it very kind of you, my good friend; I am infinitely obliged to you," exclaimed the milliner. "In the course of the week I will call and see Caroline, and I shall be able to tranquillize her. If not, I must get her sent down into the country the moment she is well enough to leave your house."

"That would be by far the best plan," said Mrs. Lindley; "or else," she added, after a short pause, "out of the country altogether."

"Something of the kind, decidedly," returned the milliner. "By the bye, Rachel Forrester will have to pay you another visit in the course of two or three weeks. You remember that I hinted something of this effect at the time when I introduced Caroline Walters to your establishment."

"I never forget any matter of business, my dear madam," said the midwife, suffering her features to relax into a smile which was, however, grim and repulsive enough.

She then rose and took her departure.

It being now the hour when supper was served up in the young ladies' room, Mrs. Brace repaired thither to preside at the table; and it was eleven o'clock when she returned to her own private parlour. The Prince of Wales was waiting for her there, Octavia Clarendon having left him a few minutes previously.

"The evils which you presaged just now, my dear friend," he said, speaking in an agitated manner, "are already developing themselves. Octavia has obtained my portrait, in which she discovers a marvellous likeness to Mr. Harley. And no wonder, indeed! But she has likewise had dreams which have left strange thoughts behind; and the faintest whisper, the slightest incident will cause the whole fatal truth to flash to her comprehension."

"She has told you all this?" said Mrs. Brace, seriously alarmed.

"Yes, and in the most artless manner possible," returned the prince.

"Then wherefore did you not seize the opportunity to break to her gradually who you really are —"

"Because it is in the nature of man to put off the hour of evil or of danger as long as possible," interrupted his Royal Highness; "and because she frightened me by certain observations which she made."

"And those observations?" said the milliner, inquiringly.

"Were to the effect that if I deceived her, she would throw herself at the feet of the king and demand justice!" responded the prince, in a low and solemn tone. "The danger is most serious, most menacing. It would be as much as all my prospects of wearing the crown are worth —"

"Yes, exposure would be terrible, ruinous," said Mrs. Brace, in a musing manner.

"I have managed to obtain a delay of six weeks before the time when I have solemnly pledged myself to procure an introduction to her father," continued the prince. "We have, therefore, ample leisure to decide upon some expedient. But if in the interval she should happen to see me in my carriage — However," he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself, "we must leave it to the chapter of accidents. If there's an exposure, we can't help it; and if there be none, so much the better."

Having thus endeavoured to console and reassure himself, his Royal Highness put on his cloak and hat, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XVI

THE "SUBJECT"

It was midnight; and Mr. Thurston was seated by the fire in his surgery, reading a medical book.

He referred to his watch and found that it was twelve o'clock precisely.

A dead silence prevailed throughout the dwelling; but in a few moments it was broken by the tinkling of the bell which hung in that room.

The surgeon started from his seat, threw the volume upon the table, and, opening the door leading into the yard, hastened to unfasten the gate communicating with the stables.

Two men instantly entered the premises, carrying some heavy and sinister-looking object between them, and as the pale beams of a sickly moon flickered on their repulsive countenances, a cold shudder passed even through the frame of the phlegmatic, selfish, and usually imperturbable Thurston.

"Punctual, you see, sir, as clockwork," whispered the Buzgloak.

"This way — quick!" said Thurston; and the two men followed him into the surgery, on the floor of which they threw their burden heavily.

It was something long and supple, enclosed in a large sack.

We have already stated, in a previous chapter, that there were three doors to the surgery, — one communicating with the consulting-parlour, the second with the yard, and the third with an apartment of which we promised to give further details.

Throwing open the door of this apartment, and leading the way, with a light in his hand, Mr. Thurston bade the two men follow him with their burden.

The room thus entered was small and nearly naked in respect to furniture. A long dissecting table, a rope suspended to a pulley fixed to the ceiling, and used to raise the head of the "subject" as high as the purposes of the experimentalist might require, and several anatomical instruments scattered about upon the table; — these were the principal features of the place. A dark green curtain covered the window, which was protected by iron bars; and the floor was strewn with coarse red sand.

Miles the Buzgloak and Dick the Tramper carried their burden into this apartment; and while one retained a tight hold of the bottom of the sack, the other, removing a cord which closed the mouth, proceeded to drag forth its contents. A human head appeared, then the upper part of a man's body, and, the sack being abruptly drawn away, the entire form was exposed to view, dressed in the garments which it had on when cut down from the fatal beam in front of Newgate.

For "the subject" thus purchased by the surgeon was Ramsey the forger; and a portion of the halter still encircled his neck.

"Well, what d'ye think of this here stiff'un?" demanded Miles the Buzgloak of the surgeon.

"Stiff'un be damned!" ejaculated Dick the Tramper. "It's as limp and yielding as a young babby; and a more lovelier corpse I never set eyes on. It's quite a pleasure and a recreation like to survey such a specimen of dead natur', — for I s'pose I may call it in that there manner."

"I'm blowed if you ain't getting sentimental over it, Dick," said the Buzgloak, casting a look of deep disgust upon his comrade.

"And the sooner you place the body upon that table, the better I shall be pleased," exclaimed the surgeon, with an imperious motion of the hand.

"Heave him up, Miles," said the Tramper; and the subject was speedily stretched at full length on the dissecting-board, its head resting on the elevated part at one extremity.

Mr. Thurston then conducted the two men back into the surgery, where he counted down the stipulated sum.

"All right," said the Buzgloak, taking up the coin. "At any future time, sir, we shall be glad of your orders, as heretofore. You must admit that we did the thing well in this

here instance, togging ourselves off spruce, and going to the sheriff's as if we was Ramsey's most particular buzzim friends — ”

“ And imploring that the body might be given up to us to receive decent burial,” added the Tramper.

“ Ah! it was finely managed, and no mistake,” continued Miles. “ White cambric fogles up to our eyes, a precious snivelling look about us, a few holler groans — ”

“ I have no doubt you played your part to perfection,” interrupted Mr. Thurston. “ Good night to you both,” he added, with that abruptness which unmistakably told the two men he would rather have their room than their company.

They accordingly took their departure; and Mr. Thurston returned to the dissecting-chamber.

Holding the candle in his hand, he approached the table; but suddenly he started, and though naturally courageous as well as utterly devoid of superstitious belief, he staggered back a few paces, as the light was reflected in something shining on the face of the form stretched upon that table.

A second glance convinced the surgeon that Ramsey's eyes were open; and at the same instant that this certainty flashed to his mind, the hanged man moved his head slowly around.

Thurston's terror — even if the feeling deserved so emphatic a name — was only momentary; and rushing up to the dissecting-board, whereon he placed the light, he examined Ramsey's countenance with earnest attention for a few instants. Yes, he was alive, and the surgeon hastened to remove the cord from his throat; then, having procured some restoratives from the pharmacy, he applied them with such good effect that the criminal speedily revived.

But as he lay gasping with the efforts made by the expanding lungs to resume their functions, it suddenly struck Thurston that he was now placed in a most painful position. What was he to do with the man, should he completely recover? To hand him up again to justice were impossible; for such a step would render himself liable to the penalties of the law for having suborned individuals to obtain possession of the body by false and illegitimate means. To turn him adrift into the streets was an act from which even the selfish mind of the surgeon revolted; and to keep him for

any length of time at the house was dangerous as well as being repugnant to his feelings.

These reflections swept through the brain of Thurston as he stood by the side of the table, watching the spasmodic writhings which shook the strong frame of the man who was throwing off the coils of death; and now consciousness slowly, slowly dawned in upon Ramsey's soul, but only as a feeble lamp, taken into a charnel-house, gradually and one by one lights up the horrors of the place.

First he remembered that he had been doomed to die; next his imagination showed him the terrible paraphernalia of the scaffold, the black beams, the countless crowds around; then the death-knell seemed again to be tolling in his ears, and his fancy revived the funeral service as it was droned forth by the ordinary; and, lastly, there was the fall of the fatal drop, followed by the tremendous jerk experienced at the throat, and the gush of blood, hot as fire, up into the burning, bursting brain.

Oh, how agonizing was the spasm which shook the criminal from the hair of his head to the soles of his feet as the slow operation of a languidly reviving consciousness brought his memory down to this appalling catastrophe; and a hollow moan of anguish burst from his lips. Then closing his eyes, he seemed to exert all his powers to steady, collect, and settle his thoughts, so that he might assure himself how much was a horrible dream and how much was a hideous reality.

At length, slowly raising his heavy lids again, he fixed his looks searchingly upon the countenance of the medical man; and thence his eyes wandered around the room, as if he were unable to comprehend where he was or what phase of existence, mortal or eternal, had succeeded the agonies produced by the fall of the drop.

But suddenly a light flashed upon his mind; and the convulsion which it caused him to experience unlocked his tongue.

"You are a surgeon," he said, in a faint voice; and then his eyes were fixed beseechingly upon him to whom those words were addressed.

"Yes; but tranquillize yourself," answered Thurston. "I will not betray you."

A feeble smile moved the lips of Ramsey as this assurance

fell upon his ear; and Thurston, lifting the still powerless wretch from the table, carried him into the surgery, where he placed him in an armchair before the cheerful fire that was still blazing in the grate. He next administered some hot brandy and water; and in another half-hour the criminal was resuscitated beyond all danger of a relapse.

"I will now tell you," said Thurston, "how I propose to act with regard to you. As a matter of course, I know who you are and all about you; but prudence requires that you should not know who I am or whereabouts in London this dwelling is situated. It will be impossible to remove you hence for some hours. You will therefore occupy a bed beneath my roof until to-morrow night, during which interval you will be comparatively restored to strength. I will then adopt measures to place you in a condition of security and beyond the reach of danger."

With tears streaming from his eyes did Ramsey pour forth his soul in gratitude to the surgeon who was thus performing, though rather in obedience to necessity than to his own free will, the first generous action which had ever characterized his life.

Circumstances now absolutely required that Mrs. Thurston should be made acquainted with what had occurred. She knew that her husband expected a subject that night; and it was not, therefore, very difficult to break the truth to her. For it would have been impossible for the surgeon to lodge Ramsey in any bedroom without her knowledge; and her connivance was also necessary to prevent the domestics from suspecting that a guest was in the house under circumstances so mysterious as to lead them to hazard all kinds of disagreeable conjectures.

He accordingly informed Ramsey of the necessity which compelled him to make a confidant of his wife; and he quitted the surgery to seek her chamber for that purpose.

But scarcely had the door closed behind him, when a thousand wild and terrible ideas rushed to the imagination of the unhappy man whom he left seated in the armchair.

Was the alleged reason for the surgeon's absence merely a pretext to lull suspicion while he went out to fetch a constable? Did the medical practitioner intend to consign him back again to the grasp of justice? Should he have to mount the scaffold a second time? Oh, the thoughts were agonizing,

excruciating; and every instant they acquired a deeper and stronger hold upon the miserable wretch's mind, enfeebled and attenuated as it was by the terrible phase through which his existence had just passed.

It never struck him, in the horrified disorder of that train of reflections which swept across his fevered imagination, that Thurston had no need to resort to subterfuge if he were playing a treacherous part; but that he might have alarmed the house, or have easily bound the resuscitated criminal in his chair until an officer was summoned. No, nothing of all this presented itself to Ramsey's contemplation. His thoughts were in a state of horrible whirlwind; his brain was a delirium.

He must fly, oh, he must fly from this house of an enemy, from this abode of a man who was about to deliver him up to justice; he must fly, he must fly!

Such were his frantic thoughts; and despair suddenly nerved him with the strength to execute his purpose. Rising from his seat, he staggered forward a few paces; then he clung to the mantel for support. Again he endeavoured to walk, and this time his step was firmer. He reached the table, on which he leaned to steady himself. The decanter of brandy was there, and he poured a quantity down his throat. It seemed to circulate throughout his entire system; he felt that his cheeks were flushing, that his heart was palpitating more quickly, that his legs grew stronger under him. Glancing around, he recognized the door leading from the dissecting-room; then he beheld that by which Thurston had quitted the surgery; and it consequently struck him that he would try the third. Advancing toward it, he saw a cloak and a hat hanging upon pegs. These articles of apparel he instantly appropriated to his own use; and, still maddened by the excruciating idea that the surgeon was playing him false, he passed into the yard, entered the mews, and thence gained the street.

The fresh air of the night invigorated him; but still he walked languidly, like a man who goes out for the first time on foot after a long and dangerous illness.

Not being well acquainted with London, he knew not where he was; and his thoughts were still too much confused, or rather, so harrowed by the horrible fears which had impelled him to quit the surgeon's house, that he paused not

to consider whither he should go or what he should do. He reflected not that he was penniless, destitute, worse, ten thousand times worse than the grovelling beggar in the street, for the meanest mendicant dared show his face in public; but he, this man fresh from the gibbet, this living proof of the executioner's unskilfulness, this resuscitated subject of the dissecting-room, oh, the blackest night was not too dark to veil his countenance, to wrap his features in its funereal pall.

But of these tremendous truths the wretched creature thought not as he dragged himself along with all the speed which he was capable of exerting. For it was not enough to have escaped from the surgeon's house: it was necessary to avoid pursuit. Such was now the idea that dominated his mind; and, overtaxing his feeble powers, he soon found that he was exhausted, soon felt that he was sinking.

He was now in a vast square; and, even at that late hour, lights were visible through the rich draperies of many windows. Strains of delicious music, the piano and the harp, poured forth their melody in sweet cadences, accompanied by soft voices in harmonious modulation. Roseate, warm, and tender were the scenes of luxury within the mansions where pleasure thus prevailed; chill was the atmosphere without, as the wretched wanderer sat down on a door-step to recruit his shattered energies.

By this time the whirl of his giddy brain was yielding to the presence of graver and more collected thoughts; and he began to perceive how mad, how foolish, how imprudent he had been to quit the surgeon's abode. His late suspicions with regard to that individual now appeared so ridiculous, so monstrously absurd, that he hated and loathed himself for having given way to them.

What was to be done? All the utter friendlessness of his position, all the misery upon which he had rushed headlong by abandoning that hospitable roof, all the perils which he was encountering face to face, passed like a hideous phantasmagorian train before his eyes. The cooler his imagination grew, the stronger was the hold that dismay, perplexity, and horror took upon him. At length, after several minutes' fearful meditation, he suddenly resolved to retrace his steps to the medical man's abode.

Inspired by this idea, he raised himself painfully from the

cold stones, and advanced languidly half around the square, endeavouring to recognize the street by which he had entered it. Vain attempt! So fevered was his imagination when proceeding thither, that he had taken no note of any particular buildings which might now serve him as landmarks; and, in total bewilderment, he sank down again at the door of a vast mansion.

Exhausted, spirit-broken, reduced to despair, the wretched being fruitlessly essayed to struggle against the deathlike sensations which came over him; the crushing feelings were stronger than his powers of resistance, and he fell back in a deep swoon.

A few minutes afterward, a splendid equipage dashed up to the front of the dwelling. Down leaped the two tall footmen from behind, the door of the vehicle was opened, the steps were lowered, and the Earl of Desborough, immediately alighting, assisted his charming countess to descend.

One of the footmen had already discovered Ramsey lying upon the steps.

"The gentleman is not dead, my lord, only in a faint," said the servant, in reply to a hasty question which the earl put.

"Then, by all means, convey him into the house and have him properly cared for," exclaimed the nobleman, "while some one hastens to fetch our physician."

"He is recovering, my lord, slightly recovering," observed the footman, who, assisted by the other domestic, had raised Ramsey from the cold pavement. "With due deference, I do not think he will require the doctor."

"I am glad of it, for his sake, poor gentleman!" said Lord Desborough. "He is evidently a respectable person, and quite a young man, too," added the earl, as the moonbeams now fell on Ramsey's countenance. "Hasten and lift him into the house."

This command was immediately obeyed; and the resuscitated convict was borne to a chamber in the lordly mansion.

The earl, having wished an affectionate good night to his beautiful countess, who repaired to her own apartment, followed the domestics to the room whither they had carried the unhappy man. Spirits, essences, and other restoratives were speedily procured; but even before they were applied Ramsey had recovered sufficient consciousness to enable him

to perceive that he was in a handsome chamber and experiencing friendly treatment. Fortunately, his presence of mind so far accompanied the returning reason as to inspire him with a lively sense of the imperious necessity of maintaining an iron control over himself, as an inadvertent word would engender the most dangerous suspicions; and suddenly remembering that there must be an ominous mark about his neck, — the fatal sign of the halter, — he shuddered as he thought of the awful risk of discovery which he had run.

But it luckily happened that the footmen had deposited him in a large easy chair before they even unfastened the collar of the cloak which he wore; and, as the candles were placed on a high mantel, his neck, though now exposed, was in the shade.

Raising his eyes, and encountering the benevolent looks of the Earl of Desborough, Ramsey murmured some few broken and indistinct words expressive of thanks for the generous treatment which he had received.

"I deserve no gratitude for performing a simple Christian duty," answered the nobleman. "As the Countess of Desborough and myself were returning home from a party, you were discovered in a deep swoon on the steps of our front door; and common humanity dictated the rest. I hope that you already feel much better."

"Oh, much better, thank God!" exclaimed Ramsey; then, having understood from the earl's observations who it was that had thus generously succoured him, he added, "My lord, it is more than a mere act of common humanity, as the world goes — But to-morrow I will explain —"

"Do not attempt a syllable of explanation for the present," interrupted the nobleman. "Are you sufficiently recovered to be left alone, or will you have my own valet to assist you to undress and retire to repose?"

"I am sufficiently recovered, my lord —"

"Then good night to you, sir," said the earl, in a kind tone; and, anxious to escape from any further expression of thanks on the part of his guest, he quitted the apartment, followed by the two footmen.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RESUSCITATED

WHEN Ramsey awoke, at a late hour in the morning, it was some time before he could so far collect his thoughts as to remember all that had occurred during the past night.

He found himself lying in a sumptuous bed; and, on putting aside the curtains, he perceived that he was in a spacious and elegant chamber, fitted up with every attention to the most luxurious comfort.

No longer by sluggish degrees, but with whirlwind rapidity, the whole train of truths swept in unto his startled soul; and remembering that the accursed mark must be upon his neck, — a mark which perhaps would linger there for many days to come, — he hurriedly raised his hand to the collar of his shirt. It was just as he had disposed it on retiring to rest; and, moreover, he recollected that he had fastened the door in order to prevent any one from entering the room and observing him while he slept.

Tranquillized by a conviction of security, at least for the present, the resuscitated criminal was enabled to reflect with calmness upon his position.

He was in a house where he had received and was still enjoying the most generous hospitality; but it would be necessary to volunteer some explanation regarding himself. A tale must be invented, a name must be assumed. These were not difficult matters with one who had grown so inured to duplicity and deception as Ramsey; and in a very short time he had a plausible history ready to narrate when occasion should demand.

The timepiece upon the mantel showed him that it was eleven o'clock; and the light of day streaming through the window-curtains made him aware that it was the forenoon.

Rising from his bed, he unlocked the door; having done which, he retired to his couch again. For he not only felt weak and feeble still, but it likewise suited his purpose to represent himself to be so much exhausted as to afford an apology for remaining at the Earl of Desborough's mansion at least until nightfall. Nevertheless, it was equally requisite, on the other hand, that he should not appear so unwell as to induce the earl to send for a medical man; inasmuch as some accident might reveal the fatal mark on his neck to the keen eye of professional experience.

Shortly after eleven, some one knocked at the door, and Ramsey invited the person to enter. A footman made his appearance, with the compliments of the earl, who was anxious to know how his guest had slept and how he felt.

"Present my most grateful thanks to your noble master," said the resuscitated, "and inform him that I am considerably better; but that, with his lordship's permission, I will repose myself for a few hours longer."

The domestic bowed and retired; and shortly afterward another servant entered the room, bearing a massive silver tray, on which were spread the materials for a luxurious breakfast.

When again left alone, Ramsey did justice to the meal; and he shuddered as he reflected that the last time food had passed his lips was within an hour of the fatal eight o'clock when he had ascended the steps leading to the scaffold.

Shortly after he had finished his breakfast, the resuscitated received a visit from the Earl of Desborough, who shook him kindly by the hand, and expressed the joy which he experienced on finding him in so improved a condition. For the nobleman had perceived at the first glance, by Ramsey's air and demeanour, that he was a gentleman, an impression which was speedily afterward confirmed by the few words which had fallen from his lips when he was conveyed to that chamber, as already detailed. The earl therefore treated him with a suitable courtesy; and, taking a chair near the bedside, he said, "I beg that you will make my house your home until your full and complete recovery; and if you wish to communicate with your friends, my servants are at your disposal."

Now was the time for Ramsey to narrate his already well-concocted history.

“ In again expressing my deep gratitude to your lordship,” he said, “ for the kindness I have experienced at your hands, I feel bound to inform you who I am, and under what circumstances I became reduced to the deplorable condition in which your lordship found me last night, or rather, at an early hour this morning. My name is Gustavus Wakefield, and my father was a West India planter, residing in Jamaica. I am an only son, and was brought up in all the indolence which characterizes the existence of the wealthy in that clime. Ten months ago my father died, leaving his affairs in a most distracted state, so that when all his liabilities were duly and honourably settled, I found myself penniless. Happy, however, in having rescued the memory of a beloved parent from the stigma which would have attached itself to his name had his debts continued unliquidated, I embarked six weeks ago for England, in the hope that a good education, unexceptionable letters of introduction, and a resolution to do justice to any situation which I might be fortunate enough to procure, would enable me to vanquish an adverse fate and fortune and gain my bread. Yesterday morning I set foot, for the first time, in the British metropolis; and I resolved to devote one day to viewing the different attractions of this mighty city ere I delivered my letters and sought for employment. Having therefore procured a lodging in a house which I considered to be respectable, I left my small portmanteau there, and sallied forth to render myself better acquainted with London. In the evening I returned to my lodging, exhausted with many hours’ rambling; and sleep soon visited my eyes. But I was presently awakened by the most terrific screaming, fighting, and quarrelling; and, hastily dressing myself, I rushed down-stairs to protect the females who were being ill-treated. The door of a room stood open; and in that apartment I beheld an orgy of so disgusting a nature as to convince me in a moment that I had been cruelly deceived in respect to the character of the house. Interference with the brawlers I perceived to be useless; but I resolved not to remain another moment in a place whose very atmosphere was contamination. I therefore hurried up-stairs, threw my portmanteau over my shoulder, and abruptly quitted the abode of infamy, although I had paid a week’s rent in advance. Under the impression that I should find

some tavern open, where I could take up my quarters, I hastened along, threading street after street, but observing that all the houses were closed. At length I grew so wearied that I was compelled to sit down and rest myself. Two respectable-looking men — at least so far as I could judge of them by the uncertain moonlight — accosted me; and I ingenuously told them all that had happened. They expressed their commiseration, and offered to conduct me to a decent tavern, where I could obtain a bed for the rest of the night. Cordially thanking them for their proposal, I hesitated not to follow them. One of the men, noticing that I was much exhausted, insisted on carrying my portmanteau; and, though I felt ashamed to give him so much trouble, I was compelled to yield to what appeared his generous solicitude. We walked on for some little distance, and at length entered a large square. The man who had the portmanteau was a few paces in advance; his friend was by my side. All on a sudden, this latter villain threw himself upon me, flung me violently upon the steps leading to a house door, and rifled me of my purse and pocketbook. The resistance I made was feeble and ineffectual; for I was nearly stunned by the maltreatment I had received. Nevertheless, I did struggle with the ruffian to the utmost of my ability; but having succeeded in robbing me, he dashed me back again with such savage ferocity on the stones that I remember nothing more until I was aroused to consciousness beneath your lordship's roof."

Ramsey ceased; and with so much apparent frankness had he told his story that the Earl of Desborough was completely deceived by it.

"It is a narrative the concluding incidents of which are unfortunately of no rare occurrence," said the nobleman. "Villainies of that class are more common than good deeds in this metropolis, Mr. Wakefield."

"But the laws, the magistrates, the constables, my lord," exclaimed Ramsey, with a well-feigned simplicity, "will procure me the restoration of my property."

"There is not the least chance of recovering it," replied the earl.

"My God! what will become of me?" ejaculated the hypocrite, clasping his hands together. "All that I possessed in the world was contained in the portmanteau and

the purse; and in the pocketbook were the letters of introduction which I had brought with me from Jamaica," he added, assuming a tone of deep despondency.

"Tranquillize yourself, Mr. Wakefield," said the nobleman; "you shall not leave this house penniless or friendless. I am not disposed to do things by halves; and your history, your manner, your language, all convince me that you are a deserving person. The honourable way in which you impoverished yourself to pay your father's debts must enlist the sympathies of every humane heart in your favour; the precipitation with which you fled from a disreputable house led to the results which actually seem a punishment inflicted on virtue. But it may perhaps prove fortunate for you in the long run that you should have thus bitterly commenced your experience of London life; for the unpleasant adventure of last night has thrown you in my way, and I will not desert you."

It was easy for Ramsey to weep tears of joy, easy to express his thanks with an appearance of the most grateful ardour; and the generous, unsuspecting, kind-hearted nobleman was thereby confirmed in the good opinion which he had already entertained of his guest.

"You shall pass a few days beneath this roof, Mr. Wakefield," he said; "and in the interval we will talk over the different plans that I may suggest for your contemplation. I shall then be better able to judge of your views, your capacities, your inclinations; and my purse and interest shall alike be placed at your disposal."

"Ah! my lord," exclaimed Ramsey, "such goodness is indeed unprecedented. But I will not intrude many hours longer upon your lordship's hospitality. Naturally of retired habits, loving seclusion, and little acquainted with the manners and customs of English life, I should only render myself ridiculous by my awkwardness, which would likewise humiliate me and increase my embarrassment."

"At all events, Mr. Wakefield, the countess and myself dine alone to-day," said the earl; "and you will favour us with your company, if you be well enough to rise from your couch toward the evening. That you shall remain in this house until I can settle some plan for your benefit, I am determined; but whether you will keep your own room or join us at our table, shall be left to your discretion."

Having thus spoken, the Earl of Desborough took a temporary leave of the fictitious Mr. Wakefield, and repaired to the apartment of the countess to recite to her ladyship all that their guest had told him.

An hour later the nobleman's valet entered Ramsey's room with a change of linen and other necessities of the toilet; and soon after the domestic had retired, the criminal rose from his couch.

Fortunately he possessed a good suit of clothes, the very same in which he had appeared upon the scaffold; and he was therefore enabled to attire himself in a becoming manner. A natural sentiment of vanity prompted him to devote considerable attention to his toilet; and the paleness which lingered on his cheeks gave him an interesting expression of countenance.

It was about five o'clock when his toilet was thus completed; and soon afterward the earl came to conduct him to the drawing-room, where he was introduced to Lady Desborough.

The countess, as credulous as her husband in respect to the tale which Ramsey had so skilfully invented, received him with more courtesy, or rather, in a more frank and friendly manner than she would have evinced toward an utter stranger under ordinary circumstances; and, believing that her guest was totally unaccustomed to European habits, she endeavoured to place him at his ease, and divest him of all feelings of painful restraint. A well-bred woman, when amiable likewise, can speedily accomplish this; moreover, Ramsey's first semblance of embarrassment was thrown off with such artful gradiencey that Eleanor was enabled to flatter herself on having succeeded "in drawing him out" and making him feel himself at home.

In the story which he related to the earl, he had fixed upon Jamaica as his birthplace and as the scene of his residence until within the last ten months, because he had read much concerning that island. He had relatives there; and from them had he been in the habit of receiving frequent letters, which, in amicable communicativeness, were wont to give long and detailed particulars of the manners, customs, and modes of life that signalized the planters. He was, therefore, enabled to converse with readiness and fluency on those subjects; and his observations were made

with an appearance of all that inartificial ease which denotes the eye-witness of the things related.

His voice was particularly agreeable, his language excellent; and there was a melancholy in his tone, his manner, and his countenance which riveted the interest of those who already compassionated the misfortunes which they believed him to have experienced.

Besides, he was handsome, very handsome; and Eleanor could not help thinking so as she conversed with him. Indeed, she had not been two hours in his society ere she caught herself reflecting that he was one of the most agreeable men she had ever encountered in her life.

Oh, had some invisible spirit whispered in her ear that those features had been convulsed in the agonies of strangulation by the accursed halter of the hangman, that fierce spasmodic writhings had passed through that slender, symmetrical, and elegant form, as it quivered between the black beam above and the yawning drop beneath, and that the fascinating Gustavus Wakefield was none other than Philip Ramsey, the resuscitated convict, oh, how speedily would the smiles have fled from her charming cheeks, how loathingly she would have recoiled even though it were but the hem of her garment touching the clothes of the wretch, how full of unutterable horror would her soul have been at the mere thought of having met him face to face!

This shows, then, how strong is the force of imagination, how powerful is the influence of a prejudice. For now, behold Lady Desborough leaning upon the arm of Ramsey as he escorts her to the dining-room; and she is already something more than contented with her companion, — she is well pleased with him.

The dinner passed away; and, after Eleanor had withdrawn, the earl and Ramsey sat conversing upon various topics for a short time. But as the latter dared not indulge in deep potations, his head being still weak and his frame nervous, and as the nobleman was habitually temperate, they speedily rejoined the countess in the drawing-room. There coffee was served; and the discourse was continued until a little after eleven, when Ramsey rose, bade his noble host and hostess good night, and withdrew to his own chamber.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DEVIL'S PUNCH - BOWL

ON the road from London to Portsmouth, and at no great distance from Petersfield, there is a deep valley, or, rather, precipitate hollow, having no outlet between any of the circumjacent heights; so that it might be filled to the very brim with water. The country in the immediate neighbourhood was particularly wild and dismal at the time of which we are writing; and it is a gloomy and sinister-looking spot even at the present day.

The main road winds around a portion of the circumference of the vast hollow; and a stone on that side of the route which is next to the valley marks the place where a horrible murder was committed many years ago upon the person of a sailor, whose corpse was thrown over the low embankment into the abyss. The assassins were discovered, condemned to death, and executed on the theatre of their crime. There they hung in chains for a long time, their blackened corpses scaring the lonely traveller, and the creaking of their irons sounding horribly in the ears of the passengers by chaise or coach.

From days immemorial the valley of which we are speaking has been known as the Devil's Punch-bowl.

But we must give some more explicit idea of the place as it was in the year 1795, whereof our tale at present treats.

All around, the sides of this immense hollow were escarped and precipitate, the ruggedness of the surface being concealed by thick furze, brambles, and rank grass. The road was narrow, separated only from the abyss by a small bank, scarcely two feet in height; so that a tipsy man, or a wayfarer ignorant of the precise features of the locality, might easily fall over, on a dark night, into the yawning pro-

fundity. Over the other side of the road frowned a portion of the hill out of which the route itself had been cut, and which rose in some places to a height of twenty or thirty feet. Not a human habitation was within a couple of miles of the Devil's Punch-bowl in those days. Lonely, sombre, and ravine-like, even in the daytime its aspect inspired gloomy thoughts in the breast of the most daring traveller, and as the stage-coaches wound their way about the semi-circumference which the road occupied, as if passing along the rim of a tremendous basin, the voices of the passengers would be suddenly hushed, and they would look forth from the windows of the vehicles, with a kind of superstitious awe, into the depth or far across the yawning abyss into which the steeds, if they took fright, might plunge the whole equipage.

Yes, with superstitious awe, we say; because many, and often fearful, were the tales which were told of deeds of violence committed in that place, — robberies and murders, rapes upon the poor, benighted female wanderers, and infanticides perpetrated by unmarried mothers who would travel thither from distances even of many miles in order to dispose of the living evidences of their shame. There were histories of terrible accidents told, too, concerning the Devil's Punch-bowl: how coaches had been precipitated into the abyss, how poor pedlars, ignorant of the gulf that lay beyond the low embankment, had stepped over it in the depth of night, with the idea of snatching a few hours' repose in a fresh green field, and had thus fallen into the eternal sleep of death, and how horses had stumbled and gone down with their riders to the bottom of the infernal pit.

Many and varied and horrible, therefore, were the legends belonging to the Devil's Punch-bowl; and superstition had not failed to lend its aid in order to enhance the terrors of the place. In the deep midnight, it was said, strange and spectral forms were seen hovering on the brink of the abyss, or moving about in its vast depths; shapes so grim and hideous that they would exist ever after in the memories of those who beheld them, as vividly as if impressed with red-hot searing iron on the brain; terrible apparitions, to gaze on which only for a single instant were to unnerve the bravest man until the last moment of his existence. Nor was this all. For the same superstition which propagated

those tales likewise declared that once in every year, on a certain day, or, rather, at deep midnight, the enemy of mankind himself and all his crew held their infernal orgies at that place. Then, while the moon veiled herself with the murky clouds and the stars sank shudderingly behind the sable pall of darkness, while the wind moaned, and the owl hooted, and the furze rustled ominously, and while the wings of the bat whirled through the intense darkness, then, in the midst of one of the long, long nights of winter, would Satan and his fiends assemble around the hollow to enjoy their hellish revel. And it was said that, when the arch-demon waved his mighty wand, a spring of pitchy blackness would issue forth from the bottom of the ravine; and higher, and higher, and higher would swell the sable tide, till it reached the brim, so that the denizens of Satan's kingdom, thus gathered there in awful congress, might quaff deep draughts of the infernal nectar, whose taste was of human blood. Nay, more, so minutely had superstition elaborated all the grim details of the tremendous orgy that it forgot not to declare how the cups whence the fiends drank were made of dead men's skulls, how the revellers danced frantically around and around their vast punch-bowl, uttering hideous cries and shouts of maniac laughter, and how the whole terrible phantasmagoria disappeared suddenly, melting into thin air, the moment the cock crew at the first glimmering of dawn.

But taking all these tales and legends for what they are worth, the huge hollow which we have attempted to describe was, in sooth, a sinister-looking, murderous, cut-throat place.

It was on the fourth evening after the incidents related in the previous chapter that the Magsman, muffled up in his great rough coat, and grasping his club, began to clamber down the steep sides of the Devil's Punch-bowl.

The clock of the nearest village had struck nine as he passed it some twenty minutes previously; the sky was heavy with dark clouds, which were, however, broken sufficiently to allow the moon to send her beams faintly forth; and the wind was rustling amidst the furze to which the Magsman clung as he lowered himself into the yawning abyss.

Soon afterward another individual, who had approached

the hollow from a different direction, began to descend into it; then, in less than ten minutes, a third, a fourth, a fifth, and a sixth, all coming from separate quarters and at short intervals, hurried downward to the same point.

At last the whole six met at the bottom of the abyss; and six greater villains had assuredly never assembled before in so appropriate a spot, or in any place with so suitable a name.

The first, as already stated, was Joe the Magsman; then there were Miles the Buzgloak, Dick the Trampler, and the Kinchin-Grand; and the party was made up by two other men of an equally desperate character.

"Well, here we are punctual, according to the appointment made the night before last in London," said Warren, throwing himself upon the ground, the others following his example. "To tell you the truth, I'm rather tired, after my day's walk. Twenty-five miles I've done since breakfast this morning."

"But you ain't too tired to act, though," observed Dick the Trampler.

"I should rather think not, indeed," returned the Magsman. "There's something I'm about to pour down my throat that would enable me to face and fight the devil himself."

"Ah! that's brandy you mean," exclaimed the Kinchin-Grand. "So much the better. I've got my flask filled, too. Does anybody want some?"

It appeared that each individual was equally well furnished; and so the offer was declined.

"Now, do you know exactly, old feller," demanded Miles the Buzgloak of the Magsman, "at what o'clock we may expect the jarvey to pass along the road?"

"Why, at about twelve, I should say; certainly not sooner," was the reply.

"Yes, but how do you judge?" demanded the Kinchin-Grand. "Because we know nothink at all about it."

"You've just the same means of judging as I have," returned the Magsman, savagely.

"And how's that?"

"Why, by knowing at what o'clock the jarvey was to leave London this morning, to be sure. Take that time, first of all; next, you know how many miles the Punch-

bowl is from town, and then you may reckon that the rattle-trap jogs on at about six miles an hour. Well, that shows you that we may expect it between twelve and one."

"Quite right, Mr. Warren," said the Kinchin-Grand. "And so we have time to smoke our pipes and rest ourselves a bit. Well, that's a comfort; for we've all walked pretty decently yesterday and to-day, 'specially each one taking a different direction, though all coming at last to the same point."

"Ah! the government little thinks what kind of chaps its people will have to deal with to-night," observed Dick the Tramper. "There can't be a suspicion of what's going to take place; 'cos there's only eight in the secret, and six on us is here."

"Eight!" ejaculated the Kinchin-Grand. "Who's the other two?"

"Why, the Gallows' Widow and Carrotty Poll, to be sure," replied the Tramper.

"Oh! ah! I forgot the women," said the Kinchin-Grand, lighting his pipe. "By the bye, Mr. Warren, you talked just now about fighting Old Nick. Do you know that they say he has his boozings here once in every year, and a precious set-out it is, too, by all accounts."

"Why, I'm blowed if you don't half-believe it," exclaimed the Magsman, who was likewise puffing a short clay filled with very strong tobacco.

"No, I'll be hanged if I do," answered the Kinchin-Grand; "or else I wouldn't be here to-night. What I undertakes, I likes to go through with; and as I shouldn't go through with this here affair if I was afeard, I shouldn't have undertook it in that case. But, I say, are we all armed as agreed upon the night afore last?"

"A pair o' pistols and a stout club for each indiividual?" added Miles the Buzgloak.

The responses were satisfactory on this head; and the men continued to chatter, smoke, and drink until the Magsman's watch, being consulted by means of placing the glowing bowl of his pipe near the dial, so as to throw the light upon it, informed the company that it was verging rapidly upon twelve.

"Now, then, my lads," exclaimed Joe Warren, "we must

prepare for action. Put away your pipes, take another swill at the bingo-flask, and follow me."

The night, as it deepened, had grown more gloomy and menacing; but still the storm, with which the clouds seemed laden, burst not forth, and still from between the black masses piled one above another on the face of heaven the straggling rays of the moon peeped timidly forth. The wind had risen to a somewhat higher key, and the air was intensely cold; but the ruffians, heated as they were with brandy and excited by the object which they had in view, felt not its chilling influence. Silently they now pursued their way, the Magsman acting as captain and a guide; and as those six forms moved from the bottom of the Punch-bowl toward the acclivity on the summit of which the main road ran, they appeared to be fiends of darkness in the faint and uncertain light of the moon.

On gaining the top, or brim, of the vast hollow, the party was divided into two sections. Miles the Buzgloak, Dick the Trampler, and the Kinchin-Grand were ordered by the Magsman to conceal themselves amidst the furze which the low embankment overlooked, while Joe Warren himself, accompanied by the two men completing the band, crossed the road and ascended the portion of the hill which commanded the route.

Being thus disposed of, the ruffians lay in wait patiently and silently.

At length the rumbling of wheels and the noise of horses' hoofs met their ears. They all listened attentively; the sounds came from that quarter whence they were expected, and there could be no doubt that this was the vehicle whose presence was the object of the night's adventure.

In a few moments two lights, glancing like meteors, began to emerge, as it were, from the obscurity; and the progress of the carriage along the road on the brim of the Punch-bowl was thus marked by its lanterns.

On came the vehicle; and now it was near enough for the ruffians who lay in ambush to observe that it was a long, hearselike concern, drawn by four horses, and with the driver seated on a high box in front.

An escort of four dragoons guarded the ponderous machine, two riding on one side, and two on the other.

In this manner the cavalcade was jogging along, when,

all on a sudden, the Magsman leaped from the overhanging hill upon the roof of the vehicle; and, hurling the driver from his seat into the middle of the road, he sprang upon the back of one of the wheel-horses, and cut all the traces in a moment.

At the same instant that the Magsman thus took the initiative, his two companions threw themselves from the overhanging eminence upon the couple of dragoons who rode on that side of the vehicle; while the two mounted soldiers, riding on the other side, were as suddenly assailed by the Buzgloak, the Tramper, and the Kinchin-Grand.

Shots were fired, and a severe conflict took place.

Away sped the four horses which the Magsman had freed from the vehicle. Frightened by the report of the pistols, they galloped along the road, their thundering hoofs raising every echo in that vast abyss, the brim of which the terrified animals were thus madly skirting.

But all that we have as yet described was the work of scarcely a minute; and the proceedings of the Magsman were executed with wondrous rapidity.

Having cut the traces and thus rendered the vehicle stationary by emancipating the horses, this desperate individual passed like lightning underneath the ponderous machine; and with one blow of his club he knocked off a massive padlock which fastened a door at the back of the huge, hearselike carriage.

The vehicle instantaneously vomited forth its contents in the shape of a dozen convicts, heavily ironed; and amidst the very foremost, the Magsman had the satisfaction of recognizing, by the flickering moonlight, the countenances of his friends Briggs and the Big Beggarman.

Meantime the four dragoons and the five villains opposed to them had maintained a desperate struggle on either side of the vehicle; but the release of the convicts decided the fortune of the fray in a very few moments. The soldiers were made prisoners without any loss of life; and they, as well as the driver of the van, were bound securely with strong cords, and deposited, powerless, beneath the overhanging hill.

Then, in the sheer spirit of wanton mischief, the whole gang of desperadoes — liberators as well as convicts — seized upon the carriage, wheeled it to the edge of the

Punch-bowl, and hurled it over the low embankment into the abyss.

Down, down thundered the ponderous machine, rolling over and over with rapid concussions that sounded like the sharp and successive reports of a brisk cannonade; down, down it went, tearing away furze, brambles, and rank grass, and ultimately dashing to pieces at the bottom of the Punch-bowl.

Satisfied with the work of destruction, and tauntingly wishing the four dragoons and the driver a good night, the party hastened away from the scene of this exploit; and having gained a neighbouring wood, the Magsman produced a quantity of files and picklocks from one of his capacious pockets. By means of these implements the convicts soon removed their fetters; and we need hardly observe that great was their joy at this triumphant and unexpected deliverance, for not even the Beggarman and Briggs had been previously aware of their friends' determination to attempt their rescue.

CHAPTER XIX

PAULINE AND GABRIEL

It was eleven o'clock on Sunday morning; and Pauline Clarendon was seated alone in a small parlour at the house which her father had taken about five weeks previously, in Cavendish Square.

The young lady was dressed in an elegant but unassuming style; and the dark colour of her gown set off to the utmost advantage her pure and stainless complexion. Her deep brown hair, so rich with its natural gloss, showered in a myriad ringlets over her well-shaped shoulders; and her neck, grandly white and gently arching, resembled a polished ivory pillar against that flood of luxuriant curls which swept her back.

Upon her countenance a soft melancholy rested; and, although the light of heaven appeared to illumine the depths of her eloquent blue eyes, yet her features expressed a certain pensiveness which imparted to her entire appearance an ineffably charming air of reflective sweetness.

From the reverie into which the lovely girl had fallen, she was presently aroused by a double knock at the front door; and, starting from her seat, she threw a glance at the mirror over the mantelpiece. A smile of satisfaction played for a moment upon her lips, for the faithful glass, reflecting her beauteous countenance, told her that she was charming; then, ashamed at the feeling of vanity to which she had thus yielded for an instant, she returned to her chair, her features at the same time assuming a somewhat severe expression.

But, oh, for Pauline to wear an angry look was not an easy task; it was merely Venus attiring herself in the armour of Minerva; and though she might fix upon her brow the helmet

of the goddess of war, yet beneath the shade of the vizor those were still the eyes of the goddess of love and beauty which looked forth.

The door opened, and Lord Florimel was announced.

Pauline rose, and proffered him her hand; but when he made a movement to convey it to his lips, she immediately withdrew it, and, indicating a chair, bade him be seated.

"In the first place, I thank you, Pauline, for granting me this interview — at last," he said, in a tone of soft remonstrance.

"I declined to accompany my father and sister to church, on purpose that I might see you alone," said Pauline. "But I scarcely know why we should have met at all, since we must part presently to encounter each other no more save upon terms of mere acquaintanceship."

"And yet it is hard that I should be condemned for a crime of which I am totally innocent," observed Florimel, with a voice and manner expressive of vexation. "As God is my judge —"

"Add not perjury to your other offences, Gabriel," interrupted Pauline. "And now give me your attention. That I have loved you well, fondly, sincerely," she continued, in a tremulous tone, "you are aware; but I am not so weak and silly a girl as to espouse a man whose infidelities will render me wretched. I appreciate all the honour which you, a great nobleman, did me at the time by the offer of your hand; and your conduct was the more generous, inasmuch as I was then in a far humbler situation than at present. Had you remained faithful to me, Gabriel," she proceeded, the pearly tears now trickling down her beauteous cheeks, "I should have esteemed myself the happiest woman in the world; and, on becoming your wife, my whole and sole care would have been to convince you that I was worthy of your affection. I do not say that I should have given you a love greater than any which human heart ever knew before; but certainly it would have been outrivalled by no devotion of which woman is capable. Bright and glorious, Gabriel, were the fairy scenes of happiness which my imagination had woven; and in that wild and romantic castle-building my soul was steeped in a fount of indescribable bliss. But gone are those visions, vanished are those sweet dreams; and all is a dreary waste where the gorgeous structures raised by my fervent fancy so

lately stood. We shall part, but on my side it will be in sorrow, and not with anger. I give you back your vows and pledges, I release you from all your solemn promises, in the same way that you must emancipate me from mine."

And as Pauline uttered these last words, she averted her countenance to hide the tears that were now streaming down it.

"My God! are things so serious as this?" exclaimed Florimel, cruelly tortured. "I have listened to you, my beloved Pauline, not with patience, but in respectful silence; and now I implore you to give an attentive ear to me in my turn. Interrupt me not, therefore, when I take God to witness that you have wronged me with your suspicions; that, although circumstances were against me and appearances unfavourable —"

"Oh, if I could only be convinced of the truth of this assertion!" ejaculated Pauline, looking up and smiling through her tears.

It was Venus laying aside the martial sternness of Minerva, and becoming the goddess of love and beauty once again.

"Yes, I can convince you, I will convince you," said the young nobleman; and, taking a letter from his pocket, he handed it to Pauline, saying, "The girl whom you encountered as she issued from my house was the bearer of that missive."

Miss Clarendon cast her eyes over the billet, and read the contents as follows :

"What think you, my dear friend, of the bearer of this? You are a naughty man for not coming to see me. Pray explain this absence of several days, not by letter, but in person. I shall expect you to sup with me on any evening you may choose to appoint; and if it be agreeable to you, I can promise that the bearer, Miss Camilla Morton, shall be of the party. All that you need now say to her is that you will attend to the note."

"Ah! Florimel, I have indeed wronged you!" exclaimed Pauline, throwing herself into his arms, and weeping upon his bosom. "I now perceive that the young woman was a stranger to you, that she was sent by some vile person to tempt you — But wherefore did you not give me this explanation at first?" she demanded, the thought suddenly striking her; and, withdrawing her arms from about his

neck, she gazed anxiously, almost searchingly, upon his countenance.

"Will you not at once banish this unpleasant incident from your mind, dearest Pauline, without asking me for any further explanations?" said Florimel, his voice and manner alike denoting that he was now troubled and embarrassed.

"If you love me, Gabriel," she answered, in a tone of mild reproach, "you will completely and fully relieve my mind from any disagreeable impressions which remain upon it. Once more, then, do I ask you why you did not at once forward me this note, to convince me that the young person whom I encountered was a stranger, and not a familiar acquaintance?"

"Pauline, I will be candid with you," returned the nobleman, taking a seat upon a sofa and compelling her to place herself by his side. "I was afraid you would recognize the handwriting in that note."

"I never saw it before," said Pauline, snatching up the billet from the table where she had flung it, and studying it with attention.

"So much the better," exclaimed Florimel. "And now ask me nothing more, I beseech you."

"This mystery distracts me!" cried the young lady. "If you have done naught of which you are ashamed, why shroud a portion of the incident in so suspicious a secrecy? Tell me everything, I conjure you. And first, wherefore should you have fancied that I might recognize the handwriting?"

"Because I feared — I dreaded — that is, I thought it probable that the person who penned this note might have had occasion at some time to write to your sister," said Florimel, cruelly embarrassed.

"Write to my sister!" ejaculated Pauline, in amazement. "Surely you cannot fancy that so vile a woman as the authoress of this letter must be could hold any correspondence with Octavia? O Gabriel! It is not because my sister has shown every proof of confidence toward him whom she loves, it is not because she is already his wife in the eyes of Heaven, though not in the estimation of the world, that you should think so injuriously of her!"

"No, no, I was mistaken, I was wrong!" cried Florimel. "And now let us change the discourse, my beloved Pauline—"

"We cannot abandon the topic in its present state," said

Miss Clarendon, firmly. "Who is the woman that wrote this letter, and whom you suspected to be in communication with Octavia?"

"I dare not — must not —" stammered Florimel, with increasing embarrassment.

"Oh, a light breaks in upon me!" suddenly ejaculated Pauline. "It is at the house of Mrs. Brace, the milliner, that Octavia meets her lover, and you are in Mrs. Brace's confidence, — you told Octavia so when you accompanied her home on that memorable morning. Yes, everything confirms my suspicions; and it is the same Mrs. Brace who is the vile authoress of that most vile letter. My God! what will become of poor Octavia? She is deceived — I can read it all —"

And, covering her face with her hands, Pauline wept bitterly.

"What have I done? What mischief have I made?" cried Florimel, starting from his seat, and beginning to pace to and fro in an agitated manner. "To set myself right with you, Pauline, I have engendered the most terrible suspicions in your mind —"

"It was my fault, Gabriel, dear Gabriel!" she exclaimed, springing toward him and throwing her arms about his neck. "Yes, it was my fault," she continued, in a voice broken with deep sobs. "I compelled you to speak out, I extracted the truth from you, and I appreciate all the delicacy which prompted you to remain silent — Oh, my poor Octavia, I fear that you are deceived, betrayed, lost, undone; for no honourable man could place the woman whom he intends to make his wife in contact with a wretch so vile as this Mrs. Brace!"

And Pauline sank, convulsed with grief, upon the sofa.

"Tranquillize yourself, my beloved; in the name of God! tranquillize yourself," said Florimel, adopting his most soothing tone. "All may not be so bad as you fancy. Octavia's intended husband may not be acquainted with the real character of this Mrs. Brace. And remember, dearest, that amongst men the milliner's private avocation is not looked upon —"

"Do not advance anything in extenuation of the wicked woman," interrupted Pauline, with impassioned tone and manner. "I will forget that you ever knew her; that you

ever made her services available to your own purposes; for that such has been the case is too evident, Gabriel. Nevertheless, all that shall be forgotten, I say, if you will now lend me your assistance on behalf of my poor deluded sister. And remember, dear Gabriel," continued the sweet girl, in a tone of earnest entreaty, "remember that when you become my husband, Octavia is thereby made your sister also, and as a brother you must be jealous of her honour. To her father, her natural protector, all this unhappy business cannot be made known; but as you are already well acquainted with every detail, — indeed, as it was from your own lips that I received the first hint respecting Octavia's love and the connection which she had formed so hastily, — it is for you to unravel the whole, and ascertain who this Mr. Harley really is."

"Mr. Harley! — is that the name?" inquired Florimel, who now heard it for the first time; and at the same instant he recollected having been informed by Mrs. Brace that Octavia's lover was a man of rank and shortly to be married, but he had not the slightest intention of espousing the elder Miss Clarendon.

"Yes, his name is Harley," repeated Pauline. "But I will show you a portrait which bears the most striking resemblance to him, for I myself have seen this Mr. Harley, and I can vouch for the marvellous accuracy of the likeness."

Thus speaking, the young lady wiped away her tears; and, opening a portfolio which lay upon the table, she displayed to the view of the astounded Lord Florimel the portrait of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

For nearly a minute the young nobleman gazed in speechless wonderment upon the print; but at length raising his eyes, and turning them slowly toward Pauline, he was shocked to perceive that her countenance was ghastly pale, that her looks were wild and haggard, and that the colour had even fled from those lips which, naturally of such a delicious coral, were now almost as white as the pearls beneath.

"My God! what is the matter?" exclaimed Florimel, extending his arms toward her; and she sank, suddenly convulsed with sobs, upon his bosom.

He seated himself on a chair, he took her upon his knees, he strained her passionately in a fond embrace, he kissed

away the tears that now rained down her cheeks, to which the excitement of bitter anguish brought back a crimson glow.

"Sweetest, dearest Pauline," he murmured in her ears, "tranquillize yourself, I implore you! Never, never did I love you so ardently, so sincerely, so devotedly, as at this moment. My God! tell me what I can do for you, angelic girl; but dry those tears, subdue these rending sobs, I conjure, I entreat you. Yes, I will behave as a brother toward Octavia, because it now rests with yourself when I shall demand your hand of Mr. Clarendon and lead you to the altar. As your husband, Pauline, I shall acquire the right to vindicate the honour of Octavia; and you have only to breathe your commands, in order to see them executed."

"Gabriel, your words console me, and these generous assurances which they convey render me as proud of you as I was already fond," said Pauline, of her own accord approaching her lips to his own and returning the fervent kisses which he imprinted thereon; then, gently disengaging herself from his embrace, and taking a seat by his side, but placing one of her fair hands in familiar and artless confidence upon his shoulder, she observed, while passing her handkerchief across her eyes, "You have now seen the portrait of Octavia's lover; and if Mr. Harley be not the Prince of Wales himself, then never was resemblance more wonderful."

"I am astonished, bewildered," exclaimed Florimel, really uncertain to what opinion he should fix his belief. "But there are strange likenesses in the world," he said, in a musing tone; "and that recent trial of which Sir Richard Stamford appeared as a prosecutor or a witness —"

"I have thought of the same incident," observed Pauline; and sometimes I have fancied that Octavia's lover may be the prince, at others that he is this very Sir Richard Stamford, and then again that he is the Mr. Harley whom he represents himself — But you, Gabriel," she exclaimed, suddenly interrupting herself, and speaking with animation, "will clear up this mystery?"

"Give me your commands, my beloved, and I will execute them," said Florimel, who, in the enthusiasm of the adoration which he now experienced toward the charming Pauline, was prepared to go through fire and water to serve her.

"I must tell you, Gabriel," she resumed, fixing upon him a look of the tenderest gratitude, "that Octavia is herself

oppressed with serious misgivings on the point which we are discussing. She strives to conceal them, poor girl; she buoys herself up with hope to the extent of her powers; and she does not dare trust her tongue to reveal all her doubts and fears and suspicions to me. But, alas! I can read the nature of her thoughts, and I know that there are times when she is unhappy, very unhappy. For her sake, Gabriel, must we at once devise the means to clear up the mystery which surrounds Mr. Harley — ”

“ Frankly, candidly, unreservedly do I now tell you, my beloved,” interrupted the young nobleman, “ that I do not believe this Mr. Harley is the person he represents himself to be. You place such implicit reliance upon me, that I should be unworthy of your love and your confidence if I did not manifest the same ingenuousness toward you. So noble is your nature, that you compel me to view duplicity and deceit with abhorrence; and I declare most solemnly that I will henceforth yield to that benign influence which your own character sheds upon me.”

“ Gabriel, I adore you!” exclaimed Pauline, throwing herself once more into his arms and embracing him affectionately. “ However wild your past life may have been, however deeply you have plunged into pleasure and dissipation, your conduct of this morning is an atonement for it all. Yes, I adore you, Gabriel; for now you are worthy of that immense love which I devote and dedicate to you, and to you alone.”

“ And may my right hand wither, Pauline, when I deceive you!” cried the impassioned Gabriel, as he covered her blushing countenance with kisses.

“ We understand each other better now than ever,” whispered the amiable girl; “ and if the sincerest affection which woman’s heart can pour forth be capable of ensuring man’s felicity, then that affection is yours and that happiness is within your reach.”

“ Oh, what sacred power, what holy influence does a virtuous woman possess over the heart of the sterner sex!” exclaimed Florimel, with the most unfeigned enthusiasm.

“ Henceforth I abjure all those pursuits which once gave me pleasure, but on which I now look with ineffable disgust; and for the future my Pauline’s bright example shall be my guiding star. Yes, lovely, angelic being, I am thine, wholly

and solely thine; and there shall not exist a secret between us."

"Were it not on account of my poor sister, I should be the happiest woman on the face of the earth," said the beautiful girl, as she resumed her place by her lover's side. "But, alas!" she added, in a different tone and with overclouding countenance, "you ere now gave utterance to words which have almost confirmed my previous suspicion that Octavia is ruined, lost, betrayed irremediably! Tell me, Gabriel, tell me, do you know aught of this Mr. Harley?"

"Listen to me, my angel, and prepare to hear evil intelligence," said the young nobleman, taking one of her fair hands and pressing it between both his own. "I know this much, that Mr. Harley is a man of rank, and that so far from entertaining honourable intentions toward your sister, he is engaged to be married to another."

"He is a man of rank," murmured Pauline, in a faint tone; "and that rank —"

"Has never been revealed to me," was the prompt reply.

"I shall no longer give way to grief," said the young lady, her countenance suddenly assuming a determined expression, although still retaining all the feminine sweetness that was natural to it. "You and I, Gabriel, must now work in Octavia's interest, but unknown to her." Then, after a moment's reflection, she rose, fetched a newspaper from an adjoining room, and, returning to her seat, observed, as she pointed to a paragraph in one of the columns of the print: "This journal of yesterday announces that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will give a grand entertainment to-morrow evening."

"To which I have received an invitation, through the interest of her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire, who is my cousin," said Florimel. "I have never yet had the honour of being presented to the heir apparent; and it was therefore my intention to avail myself of the opportunity of visiting Carlton House to-morrow evening."

"And I shall accompany you, Gabriel," returned Pauline, in a decided tone.

"Would that I had the power to make you my companion!" exclaimed the young nobleman. "I should indeed be proud of you, my angel; and when you are Lady Florimel, the doors of Carlton House will be open to you."

But the etiquette of those princely saloons is so rigid, so strict, so exclusive — ”

“ I will obtain an invitation,” said Pauline. “ Do you not think that Lord Marchmont can accomplish this much for me? If so, my cousin, the Honourable Arthur Eaton, will prevail upon his father to interest himself in my behalf.”

“ I fear that you will be disappointed in that quarter, dearest,” answered Florimel. “ Lord Marchmont is a Tory, and the Tories, you must know, have not the slightest influence at Carlton House. But — a thought strikes me! Come with me to Devonshire House, — I have the *entrée* even at this early hour, — and I will introduce you to the duchess as my intended bride. Her Grace will perhaps undertake to chaperon you to-morrow evening.”

“ A thousand thanks, dear Gabriel! In five minutes I shall be ready to accompany you.”

And thus speaking the beautiful girl tripped lightly from the room.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

THE church clocks were striking twelve as Lord Florimel handed Miss Pauline Clarendon into his carriage which was waiting at the door; and he ordered the coachman to drive to Devonshire House, Piccadilly.

Away started the splendid equipage; and the young nobleman felt proud and happy in having so charming and amiable a companion. On her side, Pauline was so profoundly touched by the frank and candid behaviour of her lover during the conversation which had so recently passed between them, that her happiness would have been complete had not the position of her sister become so serious a cause of affliction.

In due time the carriage stopped in front of Devonshire House; and the hall porter, who answered the summons given by one of Lord Florimel's footmen, said that her Grace was at home.

The young nobleman assisted Pauline to alight; and they were conducted up a magnificent staircase, into a small but elegantly furnished room, where the Duchess of Devonshire, attired in a graceful *déshabillé*, was half-reclining on a sofa placed so that she might catch the warmth of the cheerful fire which blazed on the hearth.

Florimel was a great favourite with the duchess; and she received him with all the cordial familiarity of a relative. In a becoming manner and suitable terms he presented Miss Pauline Clarendon, with the delicate intimation that she was shortly to become Lady Florimel; and the duchess, taking the young maiden's hand, addressed her with so much affability and graceful courtesy that she was instantly relieved of any embarrassment she had at first experienced on

finding herself in the presence of that brilliant leader of the fashionable world.

"It is very amiable of your Grace to receive us at this unseasonable hour," said Florimel; "and an apology is necessary on my part —"

"Not at all, Gabriel," interrupted the duchess. "You are always welcome, and doubly so this morning, inasmuch as you have brought so interesting a companion. But in the same friendly and unceremonious manner that I now receive you both, must I inform you that I have only a quarter of an hour to devote to you on this occasion; for at one o'clock her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia and the Countess of Desborough will be here."

"We will not intrude many minutes upon you, my charming and amiable cousin," said Florimel. "In fact, I have a little favour to ask you —"

"If you mean that I must be present on a certain day," exclaimed the duchess, with a smile of enchanting archness, "and that I must keep myself disengaged for a particular ceremony, rest assured that I shall experience great pleasure in accepting the invitation. I hope you intend to make my volatile cousin quite steady, Miss Clarendon?"

"I assuredly hope that the hint contained in the words of your Grace will not be thrown away upon his lordship," answered Pauline, smiling; "and I may add that I have the fullest and most implicit confidence in him."

"You will make a very interesting pair, and I long to see you both standing at the altar," said the duchess. "Indeed, you and I, Miss Clarendon, must become very good friends. In the course of the ensuing week I shall be receiving company; and I shall expect the pleasure of numbering yourself and sister amongst my guests."

"Then your Grace is aware that Miss Pauline has an elder sister?" observed Florimel.

"Mr. Eaton called upon me yesterday," responded the duchess; "and he was enthusiastic in describing and praising his two charming cousins. You therefore perceive, Miss Clarendon, that I was prepossessed in your favour before I experienced the pleasure of knowing you."

"The kindness with which your Grace has received me will never be forgotten," observed Pauline. "But I am fearful that our visit has already been prolonged —"

And she glanced significantly toward Lord Florimel.

"I will at once explain the favour which I have to solicit at your hands, dear cousin," said the young nobleman, addressing the duchess. "It was not precisely to ask your Grace to honour our bridal day with your presence, although we should not have omitted that invitation, and now we consider your Grace pledged to accept it. But my Pauline is very anxious to attend the prince's ball to-morrow evening —"

"And nothing would have afforded me greater pleasure than to introduce her," interrupted the duchess; "but it is unfortunately impossible, inasmuch as the ball is preceded by a dinner-party, to which I am honoured with an invitation. On the next occasion, however, Miss Clarendon may hold me engaged to act the agreeable part of chaperon."

Pauline was about to express her thanks for this promise so affably and readily given, when the door was thrown open, and a footman announced her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia and the Countess of Desborough.

But what pen can describe the amazement, what language can convey an idea of the astonishment of Pauline Clarendon, when in these ladies she recognized the Mrs. Mordaunt and the Mrs. Smith whom she had encountered on an occasion well remembered by the reader.

The Princess Sophia did not immediately notice the young lady, because she was at once accosted by the Duchess of Devonshire, who hastened to conduct her to a seat; but Eleanor instantaneously beheld and recognized Pauline, and, though for one moment completely astounded, yet in the next she recovered her presence of mind, and, with admirable tact, approached her, saying, "My dear Miss Clarendon, I am rejoiced to meet you again. I hope that my friend Octavia is as well as your own appearance proves you to be?"

Pauline murmured a few scarcely intelligible words in reply; for the sense of amazement had taken so strong a hold upon her that she could not immediately shake it off. But she felt the countess press with an unmistakable significance the hand which her ladyship had taken in her own; and, raising her eyes, Pauline threw upon her a look which, though rapid, conveyed the assurance that the secret was safe with her.

"I am delighted that we have thus met, Miss Clarendon," continued Eleanor, repeating the young lady's name louder than before, so that it might reach the princess and make her Royal Highness aware who was present.

And as that name struck the ears of the frail daughter of George the Third, she gave so sudden a start and turned so ashy pale, that the Duchess of Devonshire exclaimed, "Good heavens! your Royal Highness is unwell!"

At these words, Lord Florimel sprang toward the bell-pull to summon assistance; but the princess, instantaneously recovering her presence of mind by one of those almost superhuman efforts of which we mortals are sometimes capable in pressing emergencies, stopped the young nobleman with her own hand, saying, "It is nothing — a sudden indisposition seized upon me; but it has passed."

"Are you sure that you feel better, my dearest friend?" inquired the Countess of Desborough, hastily accosting the Princess Sophia. "Oh, I am well aware that your Royal Highness is subject to these sudden and evanescent attacks —"

"Thank you for your kind solicitude, my dear Eleanor," said the princess. "I can assure you that the faintness, the giddiness, which seized upon me, has totally passed."

And, as she uttered these words, she darted a significant look upon the countess, to imply that her presence of mind was completely restored.

Eleanor now returned to Pauline, who was standing at a little distance; and, taking the young lady's hand, she said, in a low and rapid whisper, "You must be presented as if you had never seen the princess before." Then, leading her toward Sophia, she exclaimed, "Permit me to introduce to your Royal Highness a much esteemed and amiable friend of mine, Miss Pauline Clarendon."

"Every friend of yours, Eleanor, is welcome to me," said the Princess Sophia, receiving Pauline with a more than ordinary condescension and graceful affability; although the colour came and went in rapid transitions upon the cheeks of the very handsome but frail and dishonoured daughter of George the Third.

Lord Florimel was likewise presented to the princess, and then to the countess, with whom he was previously unacquainted, the Duchess of Devonshire performing this cere-

mony for her noble cousin; and the conversation turned upon the grand entertainment which the Prince of Wales was to give on the following evening.

"I am glad this subject has been mentioned," observed the Duchess of Devonshire, who, in spite of her levity, was excessively good-natured, and who had taken a great fancy to Pauline; "because," she continued, "Miss Clarendon is anxious to be present at his Royal Highness's ball, and I am unable to introduce her, inasmuch as I am honoured by an invitation to dine with his Royal Highness and Mrs. Fitzherbert. But you, my dear Eleanor," she added, turning toward the Countess of Desborough, "will perhaps take charge of our young friend, who, I may observe, is shortly to become Lady Florimel."

"I should be delighted to present Miss Clarendon to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales," said the countess; "but circumstances, I fear, will prevent me from accepting the invitation with which I have been honoured."

"Indeed, my dear Eleanor," exclaimed the Princess Sophia, "you must overrule any circumstances which threaten to keep you away from my royal brother's entertainment to-morrow evening. I shall be there, and it will prove a great disappointment to me if I do not meet you on this occasion at Carlton House. I shall even consider it unkind toward myself if you remain absent."

"And I, too," said the Duchess of Devonshire, "shall be grieved if I do not meet you to-morrow evening, Eleanor. You must positively renounce any other engagement which you may have formed."

It was with no small degree of difficulty that the Countess of Desborough concealed her vexation at being thus pressed; for, as the reader may easily conceive, she had her own private motives for not wishing to attend the heir apparent's ball, nor indeed even to come in contact with his Royal Highness again. The conversation which she had overheard between him and the Magsman had filled her with loathing, indignation, and aversion for that princely voluptuary; and any tenderness of feeling which she might at one moment have experienced toward him had been changed by a deeper reading of his character into abhorrence and disgust.

But the Princess Sophia, not suspecting that her friend had any private motive of dislike with regard to the Prince

of Wales, and anxious by any means to conciliate and please the young lady who was the depositress of her own tremendous secret, continued to urge the point relative to the invitation to Carlton House with a zeal and earnestness which amounted almost to a command and rendered a refusal impossible.

"Yes, my dear Eleanor, you must go, and Miss Clarendon will then be enabled to accompany you," said the princess. "Were it not inconsistent with the prevailing etiquette, I would myself introduce Miss Clarendon."

And as she uttered these words, the Princess Sophia threw a look full of deep meaning upon Pauline, as much as to say, "Keep my secret faithfully, and I will prove your friend in all things."

The result of so much pressing on the part of her Royal Highness and the Duchess of Devonshire was that Eleanor was compelled to yield; and, in thus yielding, she was also under the necessity of offering to act as chaperon for Miss Pauline Clarendon on the occasion. It was consequently arranged that Pauline should repair to Desborough House in Berkeley Square at nine o'clock on the following evening, and thence accompany the countess to the palatial residence of the Prince of Wales.

This matter being settled, to the great delight of the young lady, she and Florimel took their leave.

When they were once more alone together in the carriage, and as they were whirling back to Cavendish Square, Florimel said, "And now, my beloved Pauline, you have gained your point most effectually; and to-morrow evening I shall have the pleasure of dancing with you at Carlton House. But what excuse will you make to your father and sister for having accompanied me in my carriage this morning, and upon what pretext will you be enabled to leave the house in ballroom costume to-morrow evening?"

"My dear Gabriel," replied Pauline, "when we reach Cavendish Square presently, you must demand a private interview with my father, and inform him that you have honoured me by a proposal, and that you have been referred to him. Will you do this?"

"I am rejoiced that I have received your permission to take this step," answered the young nobleman, pressing her hand tenderly. "Mr. Clarendon will not then think it strange

that you should have consented to take a drive — around the park shall we say? — in my carriage.”

“When he sees that your intentions are honourable, my Gabriel,” responded Pauline, “he will not allude to the circumstance. With regard to the affair of to-morrow evening, my father fortunately dines out, and I shall not be at a loss to invent some excuse to satisfy Octavia. Indeed, I will tell her that I am to accompany you to the opera, and you must call for me in your carriage at twenty minutes to nine. You can then put me down at Desborough House in Berkeley Square.”

“All this shall be attended to, my beloved,” said Florimel.

“And now, Gabriel,” resumed the young maiden, gazing tenderly upon him, “you must not imagine that because I am so ready in devising the means to lull my sister’s suspicions asleep to-morrow evening, and mislead her as to the real place and object of my visit, you must not imagine, I say, that duplicity is no stranger to me — ”

“I would not wrong you thus grossly,” exclaimed Florimel, in an impassioned tone. “I know you to be innocence itself. I am aware of the motives which prompt you to visit Carlton House to-morrow evening, and your sisterly feelings render you all the more estimable in my eyes. Your conduct, my Pauline, on the first occasion of our acquaintance, has taught me to admire, love, and respect you,” he added, again pressing the hand which he retained in his own.

“And your conduct of this day, Gabriel, has endeared you to me more than I can explain,” murmured the beautiful creature, fixing upon him a look full of unutterable feelings.

“It is sweet to be praised by your lips,” exclaimed Florimel, returning that look with one of adoration. “But I must congratulate you, Pauline, on the readiness with which your appearance and manners engage the esteem and friendship of those with whom you come in contact. The Duchess of Devonshire took an immediate fancy to you; the Countess of Desborough greeted you as kindly as if you were her sister; and the Princess Sophia pleaded most eloquently in your behalf respecting the presentation at the heir apparent’s ball to-morrow night.”

Pauline had not time to respond to these observations, for at the moment her lover had done speaking the carriage stopped in Cavendish Square.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FAIR PATRICIAN AND THE RESUSCITATED

It was about four o'clock on that Sunday afternoon when the Countess of Desborough returned to her residence in Berkeley Square.

The incidents of the morning had annoyed her; and there was a certain pouting expression upon her coral lips, which, instead of impairing the effect of her loveliness, gave an indescribable charm to her classically chiselled features.

Retiring at once to her own chamber, and dismissing her female attendants the instant they had assisted her to lay aside her bonnet and scarf, she threw herself into an arm-chair and gave way to her reflections.

"To-morrow evening I shall be doomed to meet that despicable voluptuary face to face!" — thus ran the current of her thoughts. "Oh, how my blood boils at the idea of having permitted him to bestow his lustful kisses on my cheeks, my lips! How maddened with rage do I feel at the recollection of that weakness which induced me to assent to admit him to my chamber! But, thank God! I escaped his polluted embrace; and the amour which his infamous pander and assistant, the milliner of Pall Mall, was sent hither to forward and promote was interrupted at the very moment when he stood upon the threshold of success, and I on that of shame and degradation. And now, to think that I must appear to-morrow evening in the presence of this man, treat him with the respect due to his princely rank, and receive any courtesy which he may choose to demonstrate toward me! But even this I could endure, and I should not be so deeply vexed and troubled now on that account alone. Alas! I foresee that my beloved friend, the Princess Sophia, stands upon an abyss. Her honour is in the keeping of two

young ladies — And yet neither Octavia nor Pauline would betray her! No, no, they are good and amiable girls; they will keep her secret. Her secret, indeed! Does not her royal brother know it, and is he not aware that the child was born at the very house occupied at the time by these young ladies? And one of them is to be presented to him to-morrow night! Poor Sophia! were she aware that her secret was thus known to her eldest brother, the brother of whom she stands most in awe, she would die with grief. Alas! alas! how is all this to end? My soul is filled with gloomy presentiments. Wherefore should Pauline Clarendon be thus anxious to appear at Carlton House? Is it through that curiosity which influences giddy girls, is it to gratify a mere sentiment of vanity, or has she a still less worthy motive in view? No, no; she is a good girl, I repeat, and it is natural enough that she should desire to mingle in that bright sphere of fashion to the confines of which she has only been so very lately raised."

Such were the conflicting thoughts and anxieties which swept through the imagination of the Countess of Desborough in the solitude of her own chamber. But her reflections gradually flowed into another channel; and a voluptuous languor came gradually upon her, like the softly stealing influence of a dreamy repose in an atmosphere oppressive with mingled sultriness and perfume, as she murmured the name of Gustavus Wakefield!

Then, rising from her seat, she contemplated herself in the full-length mirror which stood near; and as she surveyed her own magnificent form, which was so faithfully reflected on that polished surface, a smile of mingled triumph and joy appeared upon her lips, and then, in another moment, her bosom heaved to the profound sigh that came, as it were, from the very depths of her soul.

But the influence of her warm and impassioned nature was now upon her; and, yielding to the irresistible sway of feelings which she could not control she proceeded to the drawing-room with the secret hope of finding Ramsey there — alone!

Nor was she disappointed; for, the instant she made her appearance, the resuscitated rose from the sofa on which he had been reclining.

This was the sixth day of his sojourn at Desborough

House, over the threshold of which he had not once stirred during that interval. Nor had he encountered any of the visitors who happened to call; for, pleading a continued indisposition and likewise a disinclination to mingle in society, he had been permitted to enjoy as complete a seclusion as if he were the master of the mansion and able to act as he chose. His breakfast was served in his own chamber; at midday he was wont to repair to the drawing-room, in which the earl sometimes and the countess very frequently bore him company; and with them he had dined every evening since his arrival at the house. With Lord Desborough he was already a great favourite, and in Eleanor's eyes he was the handsomest and most agreeable individual of her acquaintance.

That he was by no means displeasing to the countess, Ramsey had not failed to observe; and his profound knowledge of human nature soon convinced him that she was a woman of strong passions. He had likewise perceived that Eleanor and her husband did not occupy the same sleeping-apartment, — that, in fact, there was a certain mysterious estrangement between them, resulting from no apparent fault on either side. Vainly did he rack his imagination to conjure the cause; the circumstance set all his ingenuity at naught; and the only hypothesis which seemed feasible was that Eleanor had been unfaithful to her husband, that he had so far forgiven her as to conceal her frailty from the world, but that he could no longer make her the partner of his bed.

And yet when inclining to this belief, Ramsey was staggered by the fact that Eleanor's deportment toward her husband was not that of a woman conscious of her secret shame; nor was the earl's behaviour toward her that of a man who had any reason to complain of his wife. On the contrary, he was most tender, affectionate, and devoted with regard to his beautiful countess; whereas her conduct was somewhat capricious and versatile — at one time reciprocating his love, and at another being characterized by a coldness which she evidently tried to subdue, but could not.

When he reflected upon these circumstances, he could not in any way reconcile them with the supposition he had formed to account for the fact of the earl and countess sleeping in separate apartments; and yet in no other manner was

he able to find a reason for this singular mode of life which they led. It was strange, most strange, that a man in the prime of his years and a lovely woman of ardent temperament and glowing passions should practise a self-denial as mysterious as it was unnatural.

But we have observed that Ramsey had perceived that he himself was not displeasing to the countess; and, unmindful of the generous hospitality which he had received and was still receiving at the hands of the Earl of Desborough, forgetful of his duty toward the nobleman who had promised to become his friend and patron, and, who, with the most admirable philanthropy, had undertaken to provide for him in future, the treacherous guest had already resolved upon the seduction of Eleanor!

With these few observations, we resume the thread of our narrative.

The heart of the Countess of Desborough was beating rapidly, and a rich carnation glow appeared beneath the transparent olive of her cheeks, as she entered the drawing-room where, as she had hoped and anticipated, she found Ramsey alone.

And he failed not to observe that heightening colour and the trepidation of her manner as she advanced across the spacious apartment, her rich dress sweeping the thick carpet on which her elastic steps scarcely left a visible impression.

"Your ladyship took advantage of a day unusually fine at this season of the year," observed Ramsey, as he made a low and graceful bow on accosting the countess.

"My beloved friend the Princess Sophia sent yesterday to command me to wait upon her at a somewhat early hour in the forenoon to-day," responded Eleanor; "and we paid a visit to the Duchess of Devonshire. But how happens it, Mr. Wakefield, that you have not also availed yourself of this glorious sunshine to breathe the fresh air? A little exercise would have benefited you after your severe indisposition."

"I feel no inclination to cross the threshold of your ladyship's hospitable mansion," said Ramsey, "until I leave it altogether," he added, with a half-stifled sigh.

"But you are in no hurry to leave us, Mr. Wakefield!" exclaimed the countess, with involuntary warmth; and instantaneously perceiving that she had spoken in such a tone, she became scarlet with confusion and embarrassment.

"I mean," she accordingly hastened to add, "that until you are perfectly recovered, it is quite unnecessary for you to seek another abode."

"Did I consult my own feelings alone, I should not, indeed, be precipitate in leaving this friendly home which I so providentially found," observed Ramsey, throwing a certain degree of mournful tenderness into his voice; "but, under circumstances, the sooner I depart —"

And, stopping short, he affected to be seized with a confusion as complete as that which Eleanor had ere now experienced in such reality.

"Has anything occurred to displease you, Mr. Wakefield?" she inquired. "It is the wish of the earl and of myself that you should receive all possible attention; and if you have sustained any annoyance, any slight, any neglect —"

"My God! I have been treated too well, too kindly," interrupted Ramsey, with enthusiasm; "and my heart abounds in feelings of the most fervent gratitude toward your noble husband and yourself."

"Then wherefore hint so mysteriously that circumstances will compel you to depart soon, Mr. Wakefield?" asked the countess, in a voice that trembled somewhat, and with a strange fluttering of the heart.

"Did I indeed make such an observation? Then I was wrong, very wrong," exclaimed Ramsey, speaking as if vexed with himself. "But in order that your ladyship may not interpret my inconsiderate words to the prejudice of the domestics of this establishment, permit me to assure you that I have received every possible attention at their hands. The circumstances to which I alluded —"

"Are perhaps connected with your position in this country?" said Eleanor. "I am acquainted with your history, — the earl has made it known to me in all its details, — and I can understand, Mr. Wakefield, how painful it must be for one nurtured in ease and comfort, and looking upon himself as the heir to a large fortune, to awake from that dream and find adversity instead of prosperity staring him in the face. Such has indeed been your lot; but you must not look upon the future with apprehension and distrust. The Earl of Desborough has proffered you his friendship; and he is a man of warm heart and generous feelings. But not until you are completely restored to health will he begin

to talk to you seriously upon the course of life which may best suit your inclinations, and on which he will assist you to enter. In the interval it is his desire that you should make this house your home; and it would grieve him were he to hear you speak of any circumstances prompting you to depart abruptly."

"Again do I assure your ladyship," said Ramsey, in a soft and low voice, "that if I consulted my own inclinations only, I should not dream of quitting this hospitable mansion. But, pardon me, forgive me," he exclaimed, his tone suddenly becoming impassioned and his manner excited, "my happiness is compromised, even if it be not already wrecked beyond redemption — Oh, would to God that I had never set foot in this metropolis, that I had never left my native Jamaica to seek my fortune on the British soil!"

And, averting his head, he appeared to be profoundly affected.

"Mr. Wakefield, I am grieved to observe that you are unhappy," said Eleanor, her heart palpitating more rapidly than ever, and a singular sensation coming over her, as if some mystic influence associated herself and her own feelings with the passionate emotions which Ramsey displayed. "I speak to you more frankly than I should to any other friend or acquaintance, because you are a guest in this house, because you are a stranger in this country, and because your misfortunes have neither been few nor light. And therefore do I repeat that I am grieved to behold these proofs of unhappiness on your part, and I fear that some secret sorrow is oppressing you. If this conjecture be correct, and if it should lie in the Earl of Desborough's power to remove the cause —"

"Every word that your ladyship utters is aggravating my misery," exclaimed Ramsey, casting upon her a look full of tenderness. Then, instantly withdrawing his eyes, he said, "I implore you to suffer me to leave this house before my feelings hurry me into expressions which you would receive with indignation, and which would leave me no alternative than suicide in the despair that I should experience for having given utterance to them."

And, as he thus spoke, he sprang from his seat and rushed toward the door.

"Mr. Wakefield — stop — I conjure you!" cried Eleanor, also starting from her chair. "This conduct on your part

will appear so strange, so unaccountable — Besides," she added, hastily, "it is scarcely kind of you to fly from us as if we were your enemies instead of your friends."

"You command me to remain, and I obey you, beauteous lady," said Ramsey, turning back and advancing slowly toward the spot where the countess, trembling all over with indescribable emotions, was supporting herself by holding to the mantelpiece. "Yes, I obey you in this, as I am ready to obey you in all things, even with the sacrifice of my life. But, remember," he added, suddenly sinking his voice to a low whisper, "remember that, when in your presence, I am not master of myself."

"What do you mean? I am bewildered — confused," murmured Eleanor, sinking back into her chair, while her glowing cheeks, her heaving bosom, and her melting eyes bore evidence to the soft and voluptuous feelings which filled her heart.

"You ask me what I mean," said Ramsey, placing himself near her, and fixing upon her a burning, impassioned look which she returned for a moment, a single moment; and then her eyes were cast downward, while deeper grew the blush upon her splendid countenance, and more agitated were the heavings of her breast. "You ask me what I mean," he repeated, after an instant's pause. "I will tell you. A strange series of adventures rendered me an inmate of your mansion. The generous hospitality which I have received beneath this roof has naturally led me to regard your noble husband as the best of men, yourself as the most estimable of women. Thus far, then, am I devoted to you; I could fall down and worship you both as the kindest friends that God ever gave to man. But, alas! toward yourself, beauteous lady, this sentiment of profound gratitude has deepened into a feeling which I never knew before, a feeling which strangely combines the most exquisite bliss with the acutest anguish, the dreams of heaven with the pains of hell. For I behold you beautiful, oh, so beautiful that you appear to me a vision of the fancy's creation, and not a being of earth; and I listen to your voice, which flows like delicious music upon my ears, and I gaze on your countenance, when you observe me not, until I feel as if I could throw myself on my knees before you and entreat that I may become your slave, your humblest menial, in order that I may demonstrate

my devotion. Yes, dear lady, all this I experience toward you; and yet I know that it is a crime to harbour such sentiments. But, my God! as well might a man endeavour to roll back the torrents of Niagara or breast the rapids of the Canadian rivers as to hope to stem the tide of such feelings as these which agitate my heart. Therefore, again do I beseech you to suffer me to depart at once, to fly from this mansion whose hospitality I have outraged with my unhappy passion, to leave a city where so bright a vision has burst upon my view to dazzle me for a moment with its supernal lustre and then leave me wretched. Yes, I will depart — O God! I will fly — ”

And again he rushed toward the door.

“ Gustavus — Mr. Wakefield — this must not be! ” exclaimed Eleanor. “ Stay — remain — I conjure you! ”

And, sinking back into the chair whence she had started for a moment, the countess covered her face with her hands, as if to close her eyes upon everything around her and look only into the depths of her own soul.

“ Is it possible that you have commanded me to remain, after hearing this confession which I have dared to make? ” said Ramsey, throwing as much tenderness as possible into his voice, as he once more placed himself near the countess. “ You are not angry with me, then? Oh, you are not angry with me, you will pardon my presumption, you will forgive my boldness, and perhaps you will pity me, dear lady? ” he added, bending his head down close to her own.

“ Oh, I am at a loss how to answer you, ” murmured Eleanor, withdrawing her hands from her countenance and slowly raising her eyes until they met his own, when glowing, ardent, and impassioned were the looks thus exchanged. “ You have surprised me, filled me with confusion, ” she added, in a melting tone; “ but you must not think of leaving me, you must not quit the house. Friendless as you are, inexperienced in the ways of this great metropolis — ”

“ But it is for your sake, my benefactress, that I am anxious to depart hence, ” interrupted Ramsey, in an impassioned tone. “ I cannot endure the idea of insulting you by the spectacle of that misery into which my hopeless passion will plunge me. In six days, six short days, I have learned to love you with an enthusiasm, an adoration, a worship amounting almost to a delirium of the feelings;

and it were madness on my part to remain within the sphere of this influence which maddens while it delights me, which bathes me in ecstatic bliss, and at the same time rends my soul with the crucifixion of ineffable tortures. Wherefore, then, should I remain — ”

“ Because I ask you to stay, because I implore you not to leave me thus,” interrupted the countess, now so completely borne away by the torrent of her own devouring passions that she was ready to plunge headlong into the abyss of guilty pleasure and consummate any sacrifice for the sake of that handsome young man who appeared a perfect Adonis in her eyes as he avowed the ardour of his love with so much apparent ingenuousness. “ No, you must remain, Gustavus, — dear Gustavus,” she added, raising her eyes toward him with a look in which all the voluptuousness of her nature and all the sensuality of her temperament spoke with an unmistakable eloquence; “ you must remain, I say; to love me, and to be loved in return.”

Her head drooped as her sinking voice murmured these last words; but in another moment she was caught in Ramsey’s arms, she was strained to his breast, their cheeks met in burning contact, and the yielding lady gave back the warm and luscious kisses which her lips received from his own.

“ Then you love me, Eleanor, you love me? ” whispered Ramsey, after a long pause.

“ From the first moment that I saw you I experienced a profound interest in you,” was the soft response; “ and that feeling has rapidly gained upon me, acquiring strength the more I saw of you, the oftener I found myself in your society.”

“ Oh, ten thousand thanks for this assurance, my adored Eleanor! ” exclaimed Ramsey, smoothing her hair of velvet blackness and softness above her high and noble forehead. “ It is sweet to be beloved by you; and if any one had whispered to me an hour ago that I was so soon to enjoy this Elysian happiness, I should have fancied that none but an angel from heaven could have conferred it on me. Dearest, dearest Eleanor, for the first time in my life do I experience the ineffable bliss of love, its mysterious depth, its unfathomable influence, its ecstatic sway, its voluptuous refinement; and I thank thee, from the profundities of my soul do I

thank thee, for initiating me in this empyrean felicity. My existence has kindled into a new life; I feel the consummation of all the golden dreams and brilliant hopes which my fancy has ever formed when wondering what love could be."

"And I also love for the first time," whispered Eleanor, her bosom throbbing with an indescribable rapture.

"For the first time!" exclaimed Ramsey. "Is it possible that you have never loved till now?"

"Never with the ardour, the devotion, the enthusiasm that I feel for you," she replied, her clear soft voice harmonizing with that enchanting loveliness which invested her as with a halo.

"Then you love not your husband, sweet Eleanor?" said Ramsey, straining her to his breast, as she lay half-reclining in his arms, her cheek resting against his own, and their hair mingling.

"No, I never loved him," she answered, emphatically; "and I may perhaps some day tell you why all his attention, devotion, and generosity could never succeed in gaining my affections. Yes, that secret may I perhaps reveal to you, Gustavus," she added, a burning blush suffusing itself over her countenance, as she at the same time cast down her eyes in shame and confusion. "But there was a moment, not very long ago, when I fancied that I loved another; and for a few days I mistook that transitory feeling for the real, pure, and true passion. Such, however, it was not; for the instant that this other's conduct manifested itself to me in its intense selfishness and utter profligacy, I was enabled to discard him from my heart with an ease that astonished even myself. But toward you, Gustavus, I experience a far different sentiment; and I know that this sentiment is love, the sincerest, tenderest love. For were you to appear before my eyes as a character less amiable and worthy than now I believe you to be, I should still love, still cling to you, still be ready and willing to follow you over the face of the earth. This, then, my Gustavus, is love, and it is a love which I have never known before and shall never know again."

"Oh, welcome, dearest Eleanor, welcome indeed to my soul is this love of thine," said Ramsey, imprinting a thousand kisses upon her lips. "Yes, welcome this virgin love as if it were also your maiden charms which you surrender up to me —"

"Gustavus, dear Gustavus," whispered Eleanor, throwing her arms about his neck and embracing him with the most impassioned ardour, "the words which you have just uttered — But, no matter — I dare not tell you my secret now —"

And her lovely head rested upon his shoulder, her bosom palpitating against his breast.

"To-night, my angel," murmured Ramsey, in a low and melting tone, for his voice was full of a rich masculine melody, "to-night you will render me completely happy, you will grant me the privileges of love, you will receive me in your chamber, not with the coyness of the timid girl, but with all the impassioned ardour which has already made your caresses so ineffably sweet."

The countess whispered a reply; and Ramsey's features became radiant with joy and triumph and sensual passion.

"Oh, what happiness awaits me," he continued, in that same soft, murmuring tone; "and how tediously will pass the hours until the blissful moment when I shall clasp thee in my arms, confident of already standing on the threshold of paradise! No, not tediously will pass these hours, because we shall be together during the interval; and, though in the presence of your husband, we must control our feelings, restrain the ardour of our looks, and speak only in the usual terms of a cold courtesy, nevertheless we shall enjoy each other's society, and in the secret depths of our hearts will exist the knowledge that we love and that we shall soon be happy. And when the witching hour arrives at last, my Eleanor, then in the retirement of your own chamber, and when clasped in each other's arms, you can breathe in my ear that secret to which you alluded ere now."

"Yes, for henceforth we will have no secrets with each other," replied the fond, impassioned woman in whose veins the hot blood circulated like lightning.

'Twas midnight, and Eleanor was now alone in her chamber.

The lady's-maids had just withdrawn, having assisted their mistress to lay aside her garments, and arrange her luxuriant hair for the night.

A loose wrapper enveloped her form, her naked feet were thrust into slippers; and, half-reclining upon a sofa drawn

near the fire, the countess awaited with indescribable feelings the coming of her lover.

The wax candles upon the mantel had been extinguished; and a small night-lamp, placed on the toilet-table, joined its rays with the light of the fire to shed a soft and subdued lustre through the room. Delicious perfumes exhaled from porcelain vases standing in the window recesses; and the warm and fragrant atmosphere seemed to be the voluptuous breath of love itself.

How rapidly beat Eleanor's heart as she lay half-reclined upon the sofa!

A species of timidity, like that which the virgin-bride feels when entering the nuptial couch, was upon her. Her colour changed fifty times in a minute, now glowing with the richest crimson upon her cheeks, now sinking into a strange paleness; and in her eyes there was an expression of intense anxiety mingling with the fires of burning, scorching, devouring passion.

Was it that she knew she was doing wrong, but that she could not wrestle against the fury of her desires. Did she experience, at the bottom of her soul, a regret that she had gone thus far? Would she have retreated and repented even yet, if it were possible to overcome these sensual longings which consumed and devoured her?

We know not, and we have not leisure now to analyze the feelings of the Countess of Desborough; for hark, a footstep in the passage reaches her ear — Oh, how audibly her heart beats, how tumultuously her bosom heaves! The door opens, and Ramsey appears.

Scarcely can he restrain his impatience sufficiently to spare a moment to lock the door; another instant, and he is clasped in the arms of the countess.

"Dearest, dearest, Eleanor!" he exclaims, as he enfolds her in his embrace.

"Dearest, dearest Gustavus!" she murmurs, straining him to her bosom.

And if hell's flames were immediately to follow the consummation of her frailty, she would not resign these few moments of Elysium to save herself from that eternity of pain.

Forgotten is her husband, forgotten is every sense of duty, forgotten is all the world beyond the four walls of that

chamber of love. Oh, if she knew everything concerning her lover! — but she did not.

“Dearest, dearest Eleanor!” What rapture was there in the words for her ears!

“Dearest, dearest Gustavus!” With what ineffable delight did she murmur the avowal of love to him who was now dearest to her of all the world!

And now Ramsey learned the nature of that secret which Eleanor had promised to reveal to him, and the knowledge of which instantly accounted for all that had hitherto appeared so extraordinary and mysterious between herself and her husband.

CHAPTER XXII

FRESH SCHEMES AND PLOTS

LEAVING the Countess of Desborough and the resuscitated to enjoy the delights of love in each other's arms, we must go back three or four hours and request our readers to accompany us, at about half-past eight o'clock on that Sunday evening, to the dwelling of Mrs. Brace in Pall Mall.

It will be remembered that this delectable lady had invited Lord Florimel to sup with her on the Sabbath now so particularly referred to, and she had promised that Camilla Morton should be present. Since the previous Monday evening, when the invitation was given, Mrs. Brace had not heard from the young nobleman; and she therefore concluded that he meant to honour her with his company. Due arrangements were accordingly made for the select banquet; and Camilla, experiencing not the remotest suspicion of Mrs. Brace's treacherous intentions, had suffered herself to be persuaded to keep her mistress company in entertaining the noble guest. It is true that the young girl would in reality have preferred the privacy of her own chamber; but this feeling on her part was solely on account of the recent loss of her parents, and not through any misgiving with respect to the integrity of the milliner. On the contrary, in the artlessness and innocence of her soul, she had fancied that it was from motives of delicacy that Mrs. Brace had invited her, as she might have chosen any other of her young ladies to be present on an occasion when she was to receive a male guest.

The preparations for the little banquet, then, were in progress; the cook was busy in the kitchen, Mrs. Brace, elegantly dressed, was already seated in her parlour, and Camilla was arranging her toilet in her own chamber, when,

at half-past eight, a letter was delivered at the house, by one of Lord Florimel's footmen.

Mrs. Brace opened it hurriedly, and read the following words:

"I regret, my dear friend, to occasion you any disappointment; but it is totally impossible for me to partake of your hospitality this evening. Nor do I think it likely that I shall ever be enabled to visit you again. For I have this day succeeded in making my peace with the charming and well-beloved Pauline; nay, more, I have demanded her in marriage of her father, who at once accepted my proposal.

"Now, look you, my dear friend, understand, and be reasonable. It suits me to throw off my bad habits and to enter on a more steady career. This I am resolved to do, and nothing shall deter me from my purpose. Be so kind, then, as to throw no more temptation in my way, to send no more young ladies to my house with letters, indeed, to forget that I was ever a patron or client of yours. Your friend I will with pleasure remain, that is, to render you a service whenever I may do so with honour to myself; but in any case, our future correspondence must be through the post. Now, do not think that I am angry with you: it is no such thing. I have not turned saint, but am merely reformed in that point of conduct which did indeed most deplorably lack amendment. I do not intend to cut you, nor yet to act ungratefully toward you; because I have received many kindnesses at your hands. But I am going to be steady, and that declaration explains everything.

"Rest assured, my dear friend, that you have no well-wisher more sincere than myself. As a proof of my good feeling I will give you a hint which may not be unserviceable; but I rely on your honour to keep the matter entirely to yourself. It is this: the plot in which poor Octavia Clarendon is the heroine thickens rapidly. My beloved Pauline is not idle on behalf of her sister; and of course I cannot stay her proceedings even if I felt inclined. In less than forty-eight hours she will have cleared up all doubts respecting the identity of Octavia's lover.

"Again I implore you to retain these hints a profound secret, at least so far as my name is concerned. But be

assured that there is a storm brewing, and you will do well to adopt some measure to screen yourself.

“ FLORIMEL.”

The letter fell from Mrs. Brace's hand, and at the same instant the Prince of Wales was ushered into the room by Harriet.

The lady's-maid retired immediately, closing the door behind her; and his Royal Highness advanced toward Mrs. Brace, who had risen from her seat on his entrance. But the moment he obtained a nearer view of her countenance, he was struck by the expression of trouble and annoyance which it wore; and, seizing both her hands, he exclaimed, “ My dear Fanny, what, in heaven's name! is the matter? ”

“ Nothing, nothing, a little temporary vexation,” she said, endeavouring to smile; but the attempt was very ineffectual.

“ It is something more serious than you choose to admit,” observed the prince. Then, his eye catching the letter which lay upon the rug, he stooped down and picked it up.

“ You must not read it! ” exclaimed Mrs. Brace, extending her hand to receive the note.

“ This is silly of you, Fanny,” said the prince, neither giving her the document nor yet reading it. “ I hold in my hand the undoubted cause of your annoyance and vexation, and you are well aware that I should not wish to become acquainted with its contents through any motive of jealousy. Such nonsense has long ceased to exist between you and me. Therefore, when I express an anxiety to read this letter, it is through pure solicitude on your behalf — ”

“ And an apprehension that it may probably refer to yourself,” added the milliner, with a tartness which she very rarely exhibited to any one, much less to the Prince of Wales. “ Well, I do not know but that you had better peruse the document,” she observed, immediately afterward, in a milder tone.

His Royal Highness accordingly cast his eyes over the letter, and his countenance fell.

“ By heaven, this is serious,” he ejaculated, flinging himself upon a seat, while Mrs. Brace resumed her chair opposite to him. “ ‘ The plot thickens rapidly,’ ” he said, in a musing tone, as he referred to Florimel's communication. “ By God! it must thicken as much as it likes,” he exclaimed,

abruptly, "for anything that I can do to prevent it. 'Pauline is not idle on behalf of her sister.' This is just what I foresaw, just what I expected all along. Pauline and Florimel are two maudlin sentimentalists together, and they will work a deal of mischief. How the deuce is it, Fanny, that you did not contrive to have Pauline debauched by some gay fellow, or else to produce a separation between her and Florimel? The thing is serious; but may I be particularly damned if I know how to remedy it. 'In less than forty-eight hours she' — that's Pauline — 'will have cleared up all doubt respecting the indentivity of Octavia's lover.' Forty-eight hours! When was this note written?"

"It reached me a few instants before you entered the room," answered Mrs. Brace.

"To be sure! I ought to have recollected the confusion and trouble in which you were plunged at the moment," said the prince. "Well, forty-eight hours — that's plenty of time to adopt some decisive measure in."

"Oh, you must not take the phrase in its literal sense," exclaimed the milliner. "It may mean a longer or it may mean a shorter period; but it is used emphatically to show that the interval will be brief ere your rank is discovered. So far, therefore, from postponing a due and serious consideration of the proper measures to be adopted, we must deliberate at once."

"If there be one thing more than another that I hate," said the prince, speaking as if he had a nausea in his mouth, "it is the trouble of thinking on disagreeable matters."

"Possibly!" observed Mrs. Brace, with petulant dryness. "But your Royal Highness will be pleased to reflect that an exposure in this instance may compromise the very crown which you have in the perspective. A young lady of good family seduced by the Prince of Wales under a feigned name, led to believe that his intentions were honourable and that he would espouse her, — my God! such a history would create a feeling of indignation from one end of the kingdom to the other; and the people would pull down my house about my ears."

"No, my dear Fanny, we'd have a regiment of guards stationed along Pall Mall to protect you," responded the prince, in a jocular manner. "Thank God, we always have plenty of general-officers who like nothing better

than having to open a murderous cannonade upon the people."

"This is not a time nor a subject for jesting," said Mrs. Brace. "I beseech you to look seriously at the matter, for it troubles me profoundly. You perceive that even if you were enabled to silence Octavia by means of the influence you exercise over her, her sister Pauline would still proceed —"

"And this Florimel would no doubt help her," added the prince. "By the bye, he is coming to Carlton House to-morrow night. He voted with the small Whig section in the House of Lords the other evening, and I was therefore compelled to place his name on my reception-list. I shall be very civil to him to-morrow, and thus disarm him of any rancour with which Pauline may have inspired him; for it is perfectly clear that the identity of Mr. Harley with the Prince of Wales is even more than suspected by that young lady, whereas Octavia is perhaps still full of uncertainty."

"You may conciliate Florimel, perhaps," said Mrs. Brace; "besides, you perceive by his note that he would rather hush the matter up if he could. But depend upon it, from all I have heard, Pauline Clarendon is a girl of spirit and will leave you no peace when once she shall have established the fact of your identity. There is only one plan that I can think of —"

"Name it, name it, my dear Fanny," cried the prince. "I knew you would end by suggesting something, you are so fertile in expedients. Besides, women always like to make matters out as bad as they can, when they mean to wind up by proposing a remedy. Now then, my dear, what is your plan?"

"Listen patiently for a few minutes," said the milliner, smiling at the compliments which the prince paid her. "You are well acquainted with Mr. Clarendon's position. A few weeks ago he believed himself certain of succeeding to the Marchmont peerage, the Honourable Arthur Eaton being then at death's door. But this young gentleman has recovered in a most miraculous manner; and there is not the slightest chance that Mr. Clarendon will ever be Lord Marchmont. To make things still more unpleasant for Mr. Clarendon, he accepted a large income from the present Lord Marchmont, and went and took a fine house, at the time when

Arthur Eaton was supposed to be dying. He is therefore totally dependent on Lord Marchmont's bounty; and at the old peer's death he will be dependent on Arthur. Such a position is doubtless intolerable for Mr. Clarendon; and yet it is quite clear that he cannot well retreat, and go back to his cottage in the Edgeware Road and his hundred or two hundred a year."

"What on earth is all this to come to?" demanded the Prince of Wales.

"Why, that you must obtain a peerage and a pension for Mr. Clarendon, as the price of having the intrigue with his elder daughter completely hushed up," returned Mrs. Brace.

"And Pauline?" said his Royal Highness.

"Must submit to any arrangement her father chooses to make," answered the astute milliner.

"By heavens! you are the shrewdest woman I ever met in all my life," exclaimed the prince. "But you forget that I have not the slightest influence with the ministry to obtain a peerage and a pension for any one who is even well known, much less for a comparatively obscure individual —"

"No influence with the ministry perhaps," interrupted Mrs. Brace; "but have you not the power of extorting by menaces from your royal father —"

And she fixed her fine eyes significantly upon him.

"To be sure! Hannah Lightfoot's paper — or rather, the half of it!" exclaimed the prince. "Your advice is admirable. I'll send my friend Tim Meagles to my father to negotiate the business. On Tuesday morning the matter shall be entered upon. Thanks to your counsel, Fanny, I now see my way pretty clearly out of this thicket of difficulties. And now you will permit me to inform you what it is that brought me hither this evening."

"I am all attention," said Mrs. Brace. "But will you stay and sup with me? You perceive by Florimel's note —"

"That he has disappointed you," added the prince, with a smile. "Well, I will take his place at your table this evening. Shall we be alone?"

"If you like. But there was to have been another —"

"A young lady, I'll be bound!" ejaculated his Royal Highness.

"Precisely. She is a sweet creature, and I intended to

tempt Florimel with her," said Mrs. Brace. "Her name is Camilla Morton, and as a camilla is she pure and chaste."

"By all means let her sup with us," cried the prince. "In the meantime I will hurriedly inform you what brought me hither this evening. You are aware that to-morrow night there are grand doings at Carlton House. Invitations were of course sent, amongst others, to the Earl and Countess of Desborough; and I heard just now — about an hour before I came hither — that the countess will accept the invitation."

"I should scarcely believe it," observed Mrs. Brace.

"But I know that she will be present to-morrow evening," returned the prince, emphatically. "My sister the Princess Sophia and the Duchess of Devonshire both told me so just now, in the course of conversation."

"And what do you propose to do?" inquired the milliner; "for, fertile as I may be in expedients, I have not as yet thought of any scheme to forward your views with respect to Lady Desborough."

"I believe that Mrs. Fitzherbert has sent to request your attendance upon her to-morrow evening to superintend her toilet, has she not?" asked the prince; and, on receiving an affirmative reply, he continued to observe, "Well, that is for the grand dinner-party at seven o'clock; and you will have to remain at Carlton House until nine or half-past in order to see that Mrs. Fitzherbert's toilet is in perfection for the ball. Is it not just as I am describing?"

"Nothing could be more accurate," responded Mrs. Brace, smiling at the minuteness of detail into which his Royal Highness was entering, and the ultimate object of which she could not by any means conjecture.

"So far, so good," resumed the prince. "Now you are aware that when the company arrive, they ascend the grand staircase, and the ladies pass into a toilet-chamber to lay aside their scarfs or cloaks, before they proceed to the ball-room."

"I cannot be ignorant of this fact," observed Mrs. Brace, "since I have more than once assisted Mrs. Fitzherbert's gentlewomen in that very chamber to receive the ladies' cloaks. This was, however, several years ago, when curiosity prompted me to take that post in order to obtain a good view

of your lady guests and observe the fashions which chiefly prevailed in their toilet."

"Ah! I had forgotten that you had done this," said the prince. "Well, it is precisely the same thing that I require you to do again to-morrow evening. You will then watch for the Countess of Desborough, and the moment she makes her appearance, you will hasten forward to attend upon her."

"But her ladyship will refuse my services with indignation," cried Mrs. Brace.

"Her ladyship, on the contrary, will affect not to recognize you," returned the prince. "Do you think that she would draw all eyes upon herself by any display of feeling on such an occasion? Besides, if questioned by her friends and acquaintances relative to the cause of her anger against you, what reply could she make? Only reflect for a moment upon her position. She has accepted the invitation, partly, no doubt, for fear her husband should imagine that she had any cause of complaint against me, and partly in compliance with the wishes of the Princess Sophia, who is her very dear friend. Her behaviour will therefore be of a character to defy the least suspicion that anything, agreeable or disagreeable, has ever taken place between herself and me."

"I comprehend the force of your reasoning," said Mrs. Brace. "I shall therefore hasten to volunteer my assistance to her ladyship the moment she enters the toilet-room —"

"And, while thus aiding her," interrupted the prince, "you will whisper in her ear these words: 'It is of the utmost importance that I should speak to your ladyship alone, for a few minutes, presently. Your honour is threatened, your reputation is at stake. I both can and will show your ladyship how to defeat your enemies.' These ominous words will terrify her, and make her anxious to know more. Her curiosity will be painfully excited, especially as you are the person to utter so singular and mysterious a warning. Taking advantage of this impression which you are certain to create, you must add these words: 'At midnight precisely I shall be at the end of the passage leading from the left of the great landing which your ladyship will cross to enter the ballrooms. If your ladyship wishes to know more, you can meet me then and there. But come alone, or I shall hurry away if I see you accompanied by any one.'"

"And if her ladyship should keep the appointment?" said Mrs. Brace, inquiringly.

"Then you will throw open the door of the room at the end of the passage where she is to meet you, and the countess will pass on into that apartment, thinking that you are showing her into some retired place where you may converse together without fear of interruption or observation."

"And what next?" asked the milliner.

"Why, the instant the countess has crossed that threshold," returned the prince, "instead of following her, you will shut the door hastily, lock it on the outside, and take your departure. Leave all the rest to me."

"The scheme appears as clumsy in its conception as it will prove awkward in the carrying out," said Mrs. Brace.

"It may seem wild, far-fetched, and even preposterous to describe," observed his Royal Highness; "but when managed with your tact and ingenuity, it will pass off just as I anticipate. At all events, you will do your best, Fanny?"

"Most decidedly," answered the milliner.

The footman now entered the room to lay the table for supper; and in a few minutes Camilla Morton made her appearance. The Prince of Wales was introduced to her as Mr. Harley; and he was instantaneously struck by her sweet, pensive, and touching style of beauty. The lily whiteness and rose-leaf hue which were so delicately mingled in her complexion were set off to the greatest advantage by her mourning garb; and the dark vesture likewise enhanced the elegance and grace of that figure which, though slight, was rounded in accordance with the most perfect specimens of Grecian art.

She was somewhat surprised when, instead of meeting Lord Florimel, she was thus introduced to a Mr. Harley; but the milliner hastened to inform her that his lordship had been seized with a sudden indisposition, and that Mr. Harley, who was "a very old friend, indeed," had dropped in by accident; and as Camilla cared nothing for either the one or the other, it was perfectly indifferent to her whether she sat down to supper with Lord Florimel or Mr. Harley.

The evening passed away; and, although Camilla fancied that Mr. Harley fixed his eyes upon her somewhat intently more than once, she was nevertheless compelled to admit to herself that he was a polished gentleman, very agreeable,

and endowed with great conversational powers. When she arose at eleven o'clock to retire to her own chamber, the prince proffered his hand and endeavoured to convey hers to his lips, while Mrs. Brace was conveniently stooping to pick up her handkerchief, but Camilla instantly snatched back her hand, while her cheeks suddenly became crimson; and, darting on his Royal Highness a look which convinced him that he had made no impression upon her heart, however agreeable she might have thought him as a companion, the young maiden hurried from the room.

And when she had gained the solitude of her own chamber, Camilla burst into tears; for a suspicion, faint as the murmuring of far-off waters in the ears, had now for the first time sprung up in the secret depths of her soul, — a suspicion with regard to the virtue of Mrs. Brace and the respectability of her establishment.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GRAND ENTERTAINMENT AT CARLTON HOUSE

It was half-past nine o'clock on the memorable Monday evening so anxiously anticipated by many hearts; and the state saloons of the princely dwelling were bathed, as it were, in a flood of roseate luxury.

Nothing could transcend, scarcely equal, the brilliancy of the scene.

The lustre of crystal chandeliers and innumerable wax candles, the gorgeous draperies, the magnificent pictures and mirrors, the splendid furniture, rich in crimson velvet, and glittering with inlaid gold, the costly vases of porcelain and alabaster, filled with hothouse flowers, the immense China jars whence perfumes exhaled, the warm and fragrant atmosphere, and the strains of delicious music which began to pour through the spacious apartment, — all these produced a magical effect, to ravish and enchant the senses.

The guests invited to the ball were now beginning to arrive; and the Prince of Wales, having already left the dinner-table, was conversing with those ladies who had been present at the select banquet.

There was Mrs. Fitzherbert, in all the grandeur of those charms which were now embellished by the richest and most tasteful toilet. Her hair, so pale in hue but so glossy and shining, appeared to have caught the golden rays of a brilliant noonday sun and to have imprisoned them in those luxuriant tresses, which showered over a back and shoulders of pearly whiteness, and even caressed the full and finely rounded bosoms which the low dress left more than half-exposed to the ravished eyes of the beholder.

Next to Mrs. Fitzherbert sat the Duchess of Devonshire, radiant in loveliness, and with glowing smiles upon her coral

lips. Nature's own roses, which art cannot equal, blushed softly upon her cheeks; and her silky auburn hair was brilliant with all the richest metallic hues. Love, pleasure, and light were in her large deep hazel eyes; she was a glorious being, a splendid specimen of that finely developed, superb, and Juno-like beauty which in a moment can melt into the tender and yielding sensuousness of wanton Venus.

And in that same saloon where the Prince of Wales was now conversing with Mrs. Fitzherbert and Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, there were other heavenly faces and lovely forms; and the lustre of the chandeliers was reflected in eyes bright as the diamonds that surmounted polished foreheads or glistened amidst shining hair. Gracefully, too, waved ostrich-plumes over charming heads; and fair hands agitated the rich fans which raised a gentle zephyr in the midst of the warm, languid, and perfumed atmosphere; and the rustling satin or the richly flowing velvet swept over the thick carpet as light footsteps moved across that scene of pleasure.

The company invited to the ball had begun to arrive; and every minute some scion of the aristocracy, some noble, with a star upon his breast, or some lady bearing a proud name, made obeisance to the heir apparent to the British throne.

Oh, who would have thought that two-thirds of the great nobles now assembled were, if stripped of all the prestige of their rank and honours, nothing more or less than the most infernal robbers, usurpers, and oppressors that ever preyed upon the vitals of the industrious millions, or who would have fancied that more than half of those beauteous creatures gathered there, and who boasted an alliance with the first families in Britain, were the veriest demireps that ever reflected in the aristocratic sphere the profligacy and demoralization which parade the pavement of the metropolis?

But so it was then, so it is at the present day, and so it will ever be with the British aristocracy until the knell of its corrupt, iniquitous, and accursed existence be rung by the mighty voice of the popular will.

To return, however, to the thread of our narrative.

We have already stated that the Prince of Wales was conversing with his special favourites in one of the magnificent saloons thrown open at Carlton House upon the occasion of which we are writing. We should now add that in another apartment of the splendid suite the Princess Sophia was

seated upon a sofa, surrounded by several ladies and nobles of the highest rank, and with whom she discoursed in a manner which they subsequently pronounced, in the usual nauseating phraseology of the court, to be most "gracious" and "condescending."

The princess was in reality a very handsome woman. Her figure was modelled to the most voluptuous proportions; the plump, sloping shoulders, the long arching neck, and the exuberant bust were of the most dazzling whiteness, and upon her cheeks the hues of the blushing rose and the stainless lily were delicately blended. Her large blue eyes languished with a wanton look, and her mouth had that unmistakable expression of sensuality which invariably marked and still marks every scion of the family of Brunswick. Her luxuriant light brown hair flowed in a thousand shining ringlets over her shoulders; and she had a habit of every now and then slightly shaking her head, as if it were a pleasure to hear the rustling of those glossy curls or to feel them moving upon her warm and polished flesh. In fine, her whole appearance conveyed the impression of an amorous young creature in whose imagination soft, tender, and wanton thoughts habitually floated, but whose passions were at times susceptible of being excited to a devouring heat and a furious intensity.

Such indeed was the Princess Sophia, one of the frail and licentious daughters of George the Third.

But we must leave her Royal Highness for a brief space, while we hasten to inform our readers that at about a quarter to ten o'clock the Earl of Desborough descended from his carriage at the principal entrance to Carlton House, and assisted his beautiful countess and the lovely Pauline Clarendon to alight. Then, giving an arm to each lady, he escorted them up the grand staircase.

Oh, how Pauline's heart beat as each step brought her nearer to that circle of light in which she knew that the master of that gorgeous scene was, as it were, embowered in luxury and enthroned in splendour. That she was about to behold Mr. Harley in the Prince of Wales she had no longer any doubt; the scene at the Duchess of Devonshire's on the preceding day had removed all previously existing uncertainty upon that point. For Mrs. Mordaunt was the Princess Sophia, and this fact accounted for the sudden disappearance

of Mr. Harley when the carriage broke down opposite Paradise Villas, on the first night of his acquaintance with Octavia and Pauline.

When, therefore, the younger Miss Clarendon had reflected upon all the incidents of that night, and recalled to mind the ridiculous tale which Mr. Harley had related (on the occasion of his second visit to the villa) to account for his abrupt departure after gazing in at the window of the travelling barouche, — when she pondered on all this, Pauline had naturally come to the conclusion that Mr. Harley was the Prince of Wales beyond all possibility of doubt.

With a beating heart, then, was it that the lovely creature now ascended the wide and brilliantly lighted marble staircase; and the inward agitation which she experienced gave a rich crimson glow to her cheeks.

On her side, the Countess of Desborough was not altogether composed and tranquil. She abhorred the idea of meeting the Prince of Wales; and, more than that, the night of love and pleasure which she had passed in the arms of Philip Ramsey had rendered her as timid and bashful as a bride on the morning after her wedding. For conscience had its qualms, or rather its terrors, with the really well-principled Eleanor, who was a mere novice in the art of duplicity, and who was very far from being an experienced profligate. Thus was it whenever she recalled to mind her frailty of the past night, she felt a burning blush mantling upon her cheeks and suffusing itself over her neck and bosom; while it seemed to her that every eye which glanced upon her countenance could read her secret in that telltale glow, and this thought, or rather sensation, made her blush all the more deeply and added to her confusion.

On reaching the summit of the grand staircase, the Earl of Desborough left his beauteous wife and the charming Pauline at the door of the ladies' toilet-chamber, while he remained in a waiting-room until they should rejoin him.

The countess and Pauline accordingly entered that toilet-chamber; and the moment the door closed behind them the former was accosted by Mrs. Brace and the latter by one of the numerous females in attendance there.

The blood mantled on Eleanor's cheeks, suffusing even her lofty brow and descending to her very neck and bosom, when the milliner of Pall Mall, with affable though pro-

foundly respectful mien, advanced to receive the velvet scarf which the patrician lady had thrown over her shoulders to defend herself against the chill night air when descending from the carriage.

The first impulse of the countess was to pass the woman by in haughty indignation; but, sweeping her looks around, she beheld several ladies of her acquaintance, and, suddenly fearful of provoking a scene with Mrs. Brace, she paused and allowed the milliner to remove the scarf from her shoulders.

"One word, your ladyship — start not — but hear me!" whispered Mrs. Brace. "I declare most solemnly that I wish you well and seek to render you a service, in spite of the displeasure you have visited upon me."

Eleanor turned completely around, fixed her magnificent eyes keenly upon the milliner's countenance, and, perceiving a solemn earnestness in the woman's manner, said, in a low voice, "Is it possible that you can have the power or inclination to render me a service?"

"Yes, a most important service, lady," replied the milliner. "Draw near toward this mirror — there! Now, permit me to arrange this straggling curl;" and, seizing the opportunity afforded by her having thus led the countess aside, Mrs. Brace said, in a deep and impressive, but only just audible voice, "The honour of your ladyship is at stake; you stand on the verge of ruin, and I alone can save you."

Eleanor started, staggered, and supported herself by laying her hand on the shoulder of Mrs. Brace, who whispered, "Compose yourself — in the name of God, compose yourself! No harm is as yet done. The evil only menaces you now — it is not present."

"And that evil?" murmured Eleanor, her cheeks, her neck, and her bosom becoming again suffused with a crimson glow; for, in the bewilderment of the moment, and with the milliner's ominous words still ringing in her ears, she naturally associated the warning she had just received with the love, voluptuousness, and frailty of the preceding night, — that night which she had passed in the arms of Philip Ramsey. Therefore was it that, with a thousand conflicting ideas springing up in her imagination, the countess murmured, inquiringly, "And that evil?"

"I cannot explain myself now, dear lady," responded Mrs.

Brace, in the same rapid and low tone; "but believe me, oh, believe me, I wish you well."

"I shall endure the most torturing suspense until you have leisure to be more explicit," said the countess, forgetting, in the agitation of her mind, that her words and manner were both calculated to make the milliner suspect that she had really done something of a nature which she would fain conceal and which she trembled to have made known.

"Your ladyship sees that I cannot enter into particulars here, nor at present," returned Mrs. Brace. Then, pausing as if to reflect upon what course it would be better to pursue, and in another moment seeming to be inspired with an idea, she said, "At midnight precisely you can steal from the ball-rooms, on any pretence, no one will perceive you; and if your ladyship will then repair to the extremity of the long passage leading from the great landing, I will be there. But come alone, for to your ear only must I breathe the communication which I have to make."

"I will be there, at midnight, punctually," murmured Eleanor, her voice sounding hoarse and thick. "Give me a glass of water."

The milliner hastened to comply with this demand; and the limpid element went hissing down the parched throat of the Countess of Desborough.

"Is your ladyship better?" inquired Mrs. Brace, as she received back the glass.

"Yes, I thank you," responded Eleanor; and, by a desperate effort, she overcame her emotions. "At all events you assure me," she whispered, rapidly, to the milliner, "that the evil, whatever it is, can be averted."

"Tranquillize yourself completely on that head, my lady," said Mrs. Brace.

"I will, I must," observed the countess. "At midnight, punctually."

And, having darted a significant look upon the milliner, whose sincerity she no longer thought of doubting, Eleanor turned to rejoin Pauline Clarendon. This young lady's hair had required some little adjustment, which had just engaged the three or four minutes occupied by the above rapidly whispered dialogue between the countess and Mrs. Brace.

It was now for the first time that the milliner observed

that Eleanor's companion was none other than Pauline Clarendon; for when the two ladies had entered the room, Mrs. Brace was so intent upon affording the countess her officious aid that she had not even thought of darting a glance at the beauteous creature who was with her. But now Mrs. Brace recognized Pauline immediately, **not** only on account of her marvellous likeness to her sister Octavia, but also from the fact of having seen them together on that morning when Camilla Morton had delivered the **note** at the house of Lord Florimel.

On thus recognizing the younger Miss Clarendon, a painful conviction instantly sprang up in the milliner's mind that something was wrong, and that the plot, as Florimel's letter had warned her, was indeed thickening. But what could she do? Nothing; matters must take their chance, and, however great her anxiety and suspense now were, there was no alternative but to await the gradual development of circumstances as they should occur.

In the meantime, while the bewildered Mrs. Brace was thus giving way to her hurried and agitated reflections, Eleanor and Pauline had issued from the toilet-chamber and rejoined the earl; then, the former leaning on his right arm, and the latter on his left, they crossed the landing to the magnificent saloons from the open portals of which streamed the warm and perfumed atmosphere.

Gloriously handsome appeared the Countess of Desborough, bewitchingly beautiful was Pauline Clarendon. The agitation which each experienced, though from such widely different causes, tinged their cheeks with a roseate hue, which set off in more dazzling contrast the fairer and softer tints. But Eleanor's olive complexion looked rich and glowing, though of transparent purity, with her own heightened colour, and in that blaze of golden lustre; while nothing could be whiter or more polished in the shape of living flesh than the forehead, neck, and bosom of Miss Clarendon.

How superb was Eleanor in her beauty, how fascinating was Pauline in her loveliness! The former seemed as if she were able to ravish a heart with one glance of her splendid black eyes, the other to steal it away with her soft and witching looks.

And now, as they entered those rooms where all was a

blaze of attractions and an assemblage of charms, yet were they not lost in the bright galaxy; but they stood out from the radiant sphere as stars of an equal glory with Mrs. Fitzherbert, the Duchess of Devonshire, or the Princess Sophia.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BALLROOM

It was to the Princess Sophia that the Earl of Desborough, the countess, and Miss Pauline Clarendon first paid their homage.

Her Royal Highness received Eleanor with a sisterly cordiality, and gave a most kind and flattering welcome to Pauline. Indeed, the ladies and nobles assembled in that apartment were astonished at the extreme air of friendliness and even familiarity with which the princess proffered her hand to Miss Clarendon; and whisperingly they asked each other who she was.

This query was soon answered by some young nobleman who had seen and admired her at Lord Marchmont's ball; and a general anxiety prevailed to become acquainted with a young lady who appeared to enjoy the highest favour with her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia.

Lord Florimel, who had already arrived, was now speedily by the side of Pauline; but she was not as yet able to take his arm, inasmuch as it was necessary that she should remain with the Earl and Countess of Desborough until after the presentation to the Prince of Wales. Florimel saw that, beneath an exterior apparently calm, a considerable agitation and excitement prevailed in the bosom of the charming creature whom he loved so devotedly; and he seized an opportunity to whisper a few reassuring words in her ears.

"Be not uneasy on my account, dear Gabriel," she hastily but tenderly responded; "there will be no scene, no betrayal of anything extraordinary, for I am already prepared to know the worst in respect to my unfortunate sister."

Florimel threw upon her a look full of affection; and Pauline rapidly returned it, as she again took the proffered

arm of the Earl of Desborough, who was now about to conduct herself and the countess into the presence of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

Amidst the brilliant assemblage they passed; and in a few minutes they crossed the threshold of the unfolded portals leading into the room where the heir apparent was conversing, as already described, with Mrs. Fitzherbert and Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire.

And now Pauline Clarendon summoned all her courage to her aid, nerved herself with all the presence of mind she could possibly command, and exerted every energy to maintain her composure.

Another moment, and she came within view of the Prince of Wales.

From her cheeks fled, in an instant, the rich hues of the rose, a cold tremor struck her as if an ice-shaft had pierced her bosom, and the Earl of Desborough felt her hand sliding from his arm.

"Courage, Miss Clarendon!" he whispered, hastily; for the nobleman imagined that she was overawed by the presence of the heir apparent.

The words recalled Pauline to herself; the colour came back to her cheeks, and she threw another rapid look toward his Royal Highness.

Oh, there was not the faintest possibility of mistake: 'twas he, Mr. Harley, the seducer of her sister!

A dizziness again seized upon Pauline as this conviction burst upon her, or rather, as the last glimmering of uncertainty was dissipated in a moment; but with an instinctive or mechanical motion she kept by the earl's side, measuring her pace to his, leaning lightly upon his arm, and appearing to be embarrassed only by that species of timidity which young ladies are accustomed to feel when introduced into the presence of royalty.

And now the earl suddenly stopped short, and Pauline made a low obeisance, because she supposed it to be the moment to do so, as indeed it was, and she heard her own name mentioned by the Countess of Desborough, who was thus presenting her to his Royal Highness, and then, timidly raising her eyes, she saw in an instant that the prince was exerting almost superhuman efforts to conceal the trouble which agitated his countenance.

Never, until Pauline's dying day, did she forget the look which his Royal Highness wore at the moment when their glances thus met. Rage, terror, amazement, confusion, uncertainty how to act, were all depicted upon those lineaments; but, quick as the eye could wink, they became composed and settled once more, so that none present save Pauline beheld that evanescent whirlwind of conflicting feelings which swept over his features.

Recovering all his presence of mind, or rather, suddenly arming himself with the courage of desperation, George Prince of Wales addressed a few affable observations to the Countess of Desborough, said something particularly friendly to the earl, and then, darting upon Pauline a look of peculiar significance, half-imploring and half-commanding her to be silent with respect to her previous knowledge of him, he at once invited her to open the ball with him.

The Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Desborough were amazed at this extraordinary and unprecedented proceeding on the part of his Royal Highness; and Mrs. Fitzherbert instantly became scarlet with anger.

For, according to the usual etiquette, the prince should have opened the ball with some lady of the highest rank; whereas he was about to bestow this exclusive honour upon a plain miss, who was comparatively unknown in the fashionable circles of the metropolis.

No wonder, then, that the Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Desborough were amazed; but we must add that they were well pleased for Pauline's sake also. Indeed, the young lady had become a special favourite with them both; and as the former was not jealous of her royal paramour's proceedings, and as the latter had nothing to be jealous of in that respect, they experienced a generous satisfaction at this brilliant triumph which Pauline was about to enjoy. For, in the courtly circles of those times, it was considered a grand thing for any young lady thus to attract the attention of royalty; and doubtless the same sickening, nauseating, maudlin sentiment prevails at the present day.

But Mrs. Fitzherbert could scarcely restrain her rage. First she became scarlet, then pale as a sheet; and her superb bosom stood upheaved with the suspended breath for nearly a minute, when it began to throb and palpitate

tumultuously. For, as ignorant as the others present concerning the motives which could possibly have induced the prince to accord the honour of his hand to Miss Pauline Clarendon for the first quadrille, Mrs. Fitzherbert naturally supposed that he was smitten with her beauty; and although she knew that he was not a saint, yet this was the first time that he had ever appeared to treat herself with such marked insult and another with such conspicuous favour in her presence.

As for Pauline, overwhelmed with confusion at the unexpected invitation which she had received, she murmured a few scarcely intelligible words of thanks for the honour conferred upon her; and, ere she was half-recovered from the bewilderment into which the entire proceeding had thrown her, she found the prince proffering her his arm to lead her into the adjacent apartment, where the dancing was to take place.

The quadrille was soon formed; and many a titled lady cast envious eyes upon Pauline, as his Royal Highness conducted her amidst the glittering throng to the head of the room.

The Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Desborough gave their hands to partners in that first dance, which the Princess Sophia likewise graced with her presence.

But where was Mrs. Fitzherbert? Overcome with a rage to which she dared not, however, give vent, she had retreated precipitately from the suite of gilded saloons where this magnificent entertainment took place.

"Pauline, I thank you for the forbearance which you exercised toward me ere now," whispered the Prince of Wales, while the gentle symphonies were floating through the rooms. "You have not been attracted hither by the same motive which has brought the other moths to flit around the light of royalty: you came to clear up a doubt, to confirm a suspicion," added the heir apparent, emphatically, although in a low voice, for he now comprehended the meaning of Lord Florimel's letter.

"Your Royal Highness thanks me for my forbearance," said Pauline, looking down and speaking in a tremulous tone; "but I deserve no praise for having exercised a proper control over my feelings. Think you that I obtained an introduction hither for the sake of proclaiming my sister's

wrongs aloud? No, I am not so insensate," she added, raising her eyes and fixing them for a moment upon the countenance of the prince.

"I read a stern decision in your looks, Pauline," he said, with a visible tremor. "What does it mean?"

"It means that justice must be done to my sister, or that her wrongs shall be bitterly avenged," answered Pauline, in reality speaking with a strong emphasis, but still without any excitement being apparent to the eyes of those who stood near.

"Vengeance? Do you talk of vengeance, Pauline?" said the prince, unable to control an ironical modulation of his voice. "Remember that it is as foolish as it is rude to breathe such a word in the ears of one who can crush his private enemies as if they were worms."

"Your Royal Highness's sister, the Princess Sophia, will protect and shield me,—for her own sake," answered Pauline, in a cold, firm, and collected tone.

Fortunate was it for the Prince of Wales that the quadrille commenced at this moment, and that the start which he gave, as Miss Clarendon mentioned his royal sister's name, was thus absorbed, as it were, in the opening of the Terpsichorean evolutions. For, like lightning searing his brain, did the remembrance flash to his imagination that the princess's frailty was known to Pauline; and this circumstance had escaped his memory and been totally lost sight of during the brief and hurried dialogue which we have just described.

"Pauline," he said, when the arrangements of the dance again allowed them an opportunity of conversing, "it is impossible that we can talk at our ease upon a certain subject this evening. But, tell me, does your sister know that you were to be presented at Carlton House —"

"Octavia entertains not the remotest suspicion of my intention," interrupted Pauline. "She is unaware that I have undertaken the championship of her wrongs, the vindication of the black treachery which has been practised upon her."

"Your words are severe, young lady," said his Royal Highness, with flushing countenance.

"Not more severe than your conduct deserves," responded Pauline, mildly but firmly.

"Well, we will discuss all this on as early an occasion as you choose to appoint," observed the prince. "But answer me one or two questions, Pauline, for you are not so ungenerous as to leave me in a state of suspense on points of no possible interest to yourself."

"Certainly not," said the young lady. "If your Royal Highness will put those questions —"

"You will answer them? Thanks for the assurance which your words imply. Tell me, then, are the Earl and Countess of Desborough aware of your object in coming hither this evening?"

"On my honour, they are not," replied Pauline, emphatically; "they believe that I am instigated by those mingled motives of curiosity and vanity which young ladies naturally entertain in this respect."

"And now tell me whether Lord Florimel —"

"Yes, he is acquainted with all my motives," interrupted Pauline. "I will not deceive your Royal Highness in a single point; but at the same time I will assure you that Lord Florimel is incapable of betraying this secret so long as it shall please me to keep it and have it kept."

"One word more, Pauline," said his Royal Highness. Then sinking his voice to a whisper which was barely audible, he asked, "Does Lord Florimel know of that adventure at the villa in the Edgware Road — that adventure, I mean, in which my sister the Princess Sophia —"

"God forbid that I should have betrayed a secret which every sentiment of honour, propriety, and humanity has hitherto enjoined me to keep!" exclaimed Pauline, in a low but emphatic tone.

"You are really a noble-minded girl," said the prince, not making the remark in the hope of conciliating Pauline's favour in the affair of her sister, but speaking with a sincerity which he expressed, as it were, in spite of himself.

Again did the requisitions of the dance compel them to break off their discourse; and as soon as they were once more enabled to resume it, the prince said, "When and where will you oblige me with an interview, Pauline?"

"I will write to your Royal Highness in the course of a few days," was the answer. "In the meantime, fear not that the breath of scandal shall be allowed to sport with the united names of yourself and Octavia."

"But you will tell Octavia that you have been here to-night, you will reveal to her that the identity of her lover with the Prince of Wales is no longer subject to a doubt?" said the heir apparent; "and then she will betray everything in the frantic wildness of her grief —"

"You know, then, that her anguish will be rending in the extreme," interrupted Pauline; "and yet you seem to be more solicitous for your own safety than for the peace of mind of that confiding and innocent girl whom you have ruined. Prince of Wales, I hate you for your inordinate selfishness," added Pauline, in a low but strangely emphatic tone; and for an instant her eyes, usually so melting and tender, shot forth the lightnings of an implacable feeling as she fixed her looks on the countenance of the heir apparent.

"It is better that we should converse no longer on this subject, Miss Clarendon," he said, deeply humiliated, yet unable to resent what he conceived to be the insult conveyed in the spirited young lady's words. "You have promised to write to me, and in the interval," he observed, assuming a kinder tone, "I trust to your goodness to pacify Octavia. Any reparation which it lies within my power to make —"

"Your Royal Highness perceives that the quadrille is now over," interrupted Pauline, coldly; "and, as you yourself have observed, it will be better not to prolong our discourse on a very painful subject."

The Prince of Wales made no reply, but conducted the young lady to a seat, where he left her with a bow. Florimel was almost immediately afterward by her side; and, with a look full of solicitude, he said, "My beloved Pauline, you have passed through a most painful ordeal — I know you have! That your worst suspicions are confirmed, I am certain, and that the prince has been talking to you upon the subject is apparent from your manner."

"Heavens! Gabriel," murmured the young lady, seriously alarmed; "do my looks indicate that the topic of conversation between his Royal Highness and myself was of a serious or unusual nature? If so, a strange and prejudicial construction may be put thereon; and it may be supposed," she added, a deep blush spreading over her countenance, "that I am one of those vain and silly women who would glory in their very frailty so long as it was a prince that seduced them into error."

"Tranquillize yourself, dearest Pauline," said Florimel. "To the eyes of all this glittering throng there was nothing peculiar in your looks or manner, nothing to encourage a belief that his Royal Highness was addressing you otherwise than in the usual strain of empty compliment and frivolous gallantry which prevail at such scenes as this. But to me, Pauline, to me, who am your lover, your adorer, your intended husband, and who likewise was aware of the motive which brought you hither, to me, I say, it was different; and I saw that your cheeks flushed sometimes, then grew pale suddenly; I saw also that you were profoundly excited in reality, though wearing an exterior of calmness and tranquillity. Yes, all this I observed, my Pauline, and I pitied you."

"Dearest Gabriel! your kind words recompense me for much of the pain which I have just endured," said the young lady. "But we shall be observed if we continue to discourse in a style that is naturally accompanied by a kindred seriousness of the countenance. Come," she added, a brilliant smile animating her lovely features; "give me your arm and let us take our place in the quadrille which is now forming, for I presume that we are to dance together this time."

And the bright and beautiful pair rose from their seats to join the second quadrille.

In the meantime the Prince of Wales, on leaving Pauline, bethought himself of the sudden and abrupt manner in which he had left Mrs. Fitzherbert some twenty minutes previously; and it now struck him that she was probably offended at the favour which he had shown to Miss Clarendon in selecting her for his partner, instead of some lady of high rank, for the first quadrille.

Returning, therefore, to the room where he had previously been seated with Mrs. Fitzherbert, he looked around for her in vain; and having traversed the entire suite of splendid saloons without perceiving her, he accosted the Duchess of Devonshire for information.

Drawing her Grace aside from a group of ladies with whom she was conversing, the prince said, "Where is Mrs. Fitzherbert?"

"Indeed, I have not seen her since the commencement of the first quadrille," answered Georgiana. "And now that I recollect, she did not dance —"

"I can understand it all," interrupted the prince, in a tone of vexation. "She is offended with me, because I chose to honour Miss Pauline Clarendon by selecting her for that quadrille, and she has doubtless retired to her own apartment in a pet. Now, my dear Georgiana, you must go and persuade her to return ere her absence be so prolonged as to occasion unpleasant comment."

"I had rather that your Royal Highness would find me a more agreeable employment," said the duchess, pouting her beauteous lips; "for, to tell you the truth," she added, sinking her voice to a low whisper, and fixing upon him a significant look, "it is no pleasant task to act as peacemaker between husband and wife."

"Georgiana," said the prince, likewise in a low tone, but with almost a savage emphasis, and certainly with a ferocious look, "I command you not to speak thus of myself and Mrs. Fitzherbert."

"I was only anxious to hear what you would say in reply," observed the sprightly duchess, by no means abashed, but with an enchanting gaiety of tone and manner and a species of wicked, mischief-loving archness which rendered her beautiful countenance absolutely radiant at the moment. "However," she exclaimed, tapping the prince's arm with her fan, "since I have rendered you angry, I will endeavour to atone for my indiscretion by acting as a peacemaker between your Royal Highness and Mrs. Fitzherbert."

With these words, the Duchess of Devonshire turned away and quitted the room in order to seek the private apartments of Mrs. Fitzherbert; and the Prince of Wales, at that moment catching a glimpse of the Countess of Desborough's fine figure as she moved with mingled elegance and grace through the labyrinthine dance, was reminded of the plot he had set afloat in regard to her.

We have already observed that Eleanor looked perfectly splendid on the present occasion; and the royal voluptuary was fired with a devouring passion as his eyes now followed that magnificent form which seemed to glow with all the ardour of its own temperament beneath the exciting influence of the Muse Terpsichore.

Anxious to learn whether Mrs. Brace had succeeded in playing the part entrusted to her, the prince quitted the ballroom, traversed the landing, and entered a private cham-

ber, where a page was in attendance. This youth was despatched to summon Mrs. Brace to his royal master's presence; and in a few minutes the milliner made her appearance.

"What news concerning the charming Eleanor?" said the prince, the moment they were alone together.

"Her ladyship has completely fallen into the snare," responded the unprincipled woman; "and she will meet me at midnight in the appointed place."

"So far, so good!" exclaimed his Royal Highness; then, referring to his watch, he observed, "It is now half-past eleven o'clock; mind you are punctual at your post."

"Fear nothing on that head," returned Mrs. Brace. "So far as the matter depends upon me, the beautiful Countess of Desborough will be in your power. That she also will be punctual, I have no doubt; for the mysterious words which, according to your instructions, I breathed in her ears, produced a magical effect. With all her pride and display of virtue, that haughty lady is not immaculate. Conscious of some frailty, she trembles lest her secret be already known. Otherwise she would never have fallen into the trap which has this night been set to ensnare her."

"Oh, charming Eleanor," exclaimed the prince, carried away by the violence of his licentious longing, "within an hour shall I clasp thee in my arms, within an hour shall I have revelled in thy beauties!"

"And is it possible that your Royal Highness can thus give free course to these thoughts and hopes while a terrible danger appears to be menacing you?" demanded Mrs. Brace; "for surely you must have already seen Pauline Clarendon here to-night, and can her visit bode any good to you?"

"I have seen her, and no danger is to be apprehended for the moment," answered the prince.

"But she knows your Royal Highness to be Mr. Harley, or Mr. Harley to be your Royal Highness, — whichever you choose?" exclaimed the milliner.

"Yes, yes; all that she knows perfectly," said the heir apparent; "and a very extraordinary girl she is. Gifted with a remarkable spirit, great presence of mind, and wonderful courage, she can defy, dare, and threaten a prince. Nay, more, to my very face she told me that she hated me."

"And yet your Royal Highness declares that there is no danger!" cried Mrs. Bráce, in a species of bewilderment.

"Not for the present, I tell you," exclaimed George, who was a firm believer in the Christian maxim which says, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Pauline will let me know very shortly what she wishes me to do in her sister's matter; and when the time comes, why, then we'll think about it. You know I am not a man who meets misfortune half-way. I hate anticipating evil; 'tis bad enough when it comes. And now, my dear Fanny, I must thank you for the aid you have rendered me in my scheme respecting Lady Desborough."

With these words, his Royal Highness imprinted a kiss upon the lips of the handsome milliner; and, having once more conjured her to be punctual at the place of appointment, he sped back to the brilliant saloons where the dancing was going on with increasing spirit.

The Duchess of Devonshire had already returned thither; and the prince was speedily by her side.

"What news, my dear Georgiana?" demanded he.

"I cannot find Mrs. Fitzherbert in her apartments," answered the duchess. "She is not there, and I am assured, in answer to the inquiries which I made, that her servants have not seen her since the commencement of the ball."

"Very strange!" ejaculated the prince. Then, in a calmer and far more indifferent tone, he observed, "But there are plenty of other rooms in Carlton House to which she could have retired for the purpose of enjoying her sulks; and I shall not trouble myself further in the matter. Thanks, however, Georgiana, to you for your kindness in endeavouring to seek her."

The prince remained in conversation with the charming and sprightly duchess for about ten minutes longer, at the expiration of which period he again quitted the brilliant saloons.

CHAPTER XXV

ANOTHER SCENE AT CARLTON HOUSE

THE Countess of Desborough had appeared radiantly beautiful to all eyes; but that carnation glow which suffused her cheeks with its richest hue was heightened by the conflicting emotions that warred within her bosom, as well as by the effort which she made to conceal them.

In the little leisure which the excitement of the brilliant scene and the gay dance left her to commune with herself, she had vainly endeavoured to conjecture what could be the aim and nature of the mysterious warning given her by Mrs. Brace. Was it possible that her frailty with the individual whom she knew as Gustavus Wakefield, and whom she already loved with an earnest and devoted affection, was it possible that this frailty could be known, or even suspected? And if not, then how could her fair name be menaced, and how could evil or danger be threatening her? Lastly, whatever were the peril, how happened it that Mrs. Brace, of all women in the world, should be able and willing to rescue her from its consequences?

These thoughts swept, with whirlwind speed, many times through the brain of the Countess of Desborough during the evening; but the oftener they recurred to her mind, the more bewildering did they seem, and the less easy was it to hazard a conjecture upon a single point.

Tortured with the cruellest suspense, harassed with the most painful misgiving; at one moment fearful that some treachery was intended, at another experiencing a full revival of confidence in the sincerity of the milliner; now trembling lest the Prince of Wales himself should be at the bottom of the whole affair, then reassuring herself with the argument that he would never dare to devise any plot or

perpetrate any outrage against her beneath his own roof and on such an occasion as the present; at one time resolving to treat the thing with contempt, at another deciding upon keeping the appointment; now painfully recalling to mind the milliner's former misconduct and duplicity, then starting at the recollection of the solemn and impressive manner in which the warning was given, — thus, torn with a thousand conflicting sentiments, the Countess of Desborough knew not how to act.

At length, when still undecided, her eyes encountered a timepiece; the hands marked midnight.

Rapidly sweeping her looks around, she saw that her husband was conversing at a distance with some other noblemen, that the Duchess of Devonshire was talking to Pauline Clarendon and Florimel, and that the Princess Sophia was engaged with a group of ladies in another quarter.

For the first time during the evening did the countess, therefore, now find herself so entirely alone, as it were, amidst the brilliant throng, that she could escape without being perceived from the saloons.

Should she go? Should she keep the appointment?

Yes, an invincible feeling urged her to adopt the affirmative course; for her conscience, making a coward of her in one sense, prompted her to hasten and learn the nature of the peril which threatened her.

Behold her issuing forth from the gorgeous saloons. There are servants on the landing, in the antechambers; but what of that? She may be going to the toilet-room or to Mrs. Fitzherbert's apartments. It does not, therefore, seem strange that she should thus have left the saloons, alone.

The passage is gained; lightly and rapidly she threads it. Mrs. Brace is waiting for her at the end. The milliner places her finger with mysterious significance upon her lip, and hastily throws open a door. Eleanor crosses the threshold; the door closes noiselessly behind her.

But, without perceiving that she is alone, — indeed, fancying that the milliner is following her, — she traverses a small antechamber lighted by a lamp held in the hand of an alabaster statue. An open door faces her; she unhesitatingly enters the apartment with which it communicates.

but scarcely has she crossed the threshold when this door is likewise closed behind her, and she is clasped in the arms of the Prince of Wales.

Eleanor saw that she was betrayed; but, without giving vent to shrieks or screams, — she was too courageous a woman for such an ebullition of pusillanimous feelings, — she disengaged herself with a desperate effort from his arms. Then, rapidly smoothing her disordered hair, she said, in a low tone of remarkable decision, “I will sooner perish than become your victim!”

And her magnificent eyes darted forth lightnings upon the countenance of the heir apparent.

“Haughty lady, you are in my power,” he exclaimed, nothing discomfited; “and no human aid can rescue you therefrom.”

“What means your Royal Highness?” demanded Eleanor, drawing her fine form up to its full height, and assuming a bearing so splendid and queenlike in its dignified indignation, that for a few moments the unprincipled voluptuary was indeed overawed. “What means your Royal Highness?” she repeated, in a voice that trembled not. Then, sweeping her eyes rapidly around, and perceiving that it was a bed-chamber to which foul treachery had thus inveigled her, she said, “If you intend to exert brute force to retain me here, then will I resist you to the utmost of my power. There are windows,” she continued, pointing toward the casements, “and I will summon assistance thence. If no succour should come, I will precipitate myself therefrom sooner than become the victim of a miscreant voluptuary such as you!”

“By heaven! your words would provoke me strangely, proud and self-sufficient lady,” exclaimed the prince, “were you not so completely in my power that I can take full and ample vengeance upon you. But, oh, you are so handsome, so divinely beautiful,” he said, his voice suddenly assuming a melting tone and his countenance a tender expression, “that I would not for worlds remain your enemy if you would only permit me to be your friend.”

“My friend!” repeated the countess, with bitter irony. “Is it to insult and mock one whom you have already cruelly outraged that you use those words? But I understand you, Prince of Wales!” she exclaimed, in a nobler, bolder, and loftier tone, while her countenance became

lighted up with an animation that gave her the aspect of an avenging goddess. "Yes, I understand you now. You imagine that because you are his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, eldest son of the King of England, and heir apparent to the throne on which that monarch sits, you imagine, I say, that because you have only one more step to ascend in order to reach the pinnacle of earthly splendour and grasp the sceptre of an empire upon which the sun never sets, you imagine that because the accident of birth has placed you in a position so proud as this, you have a right to trample upon all those usages, customs, or proprieties which may militate against your own selfish pleasures. Yes, this is your arrogance, this is your presumption. You fancy yourself a god, whereas you are but a very miserable and despicable man."

So astounded was the Prince of Wales at being thus addressed, that he stood gazing in stupid wonderment upon the brave and spirited lady who dared to read him such a lesson; and this, let the reader recollect, was the second time that he had been reprov'd and set at defiance by female lips upon the memorable evening whose incidents we are describing.

"I have heard of republican writers and democratic speakers," continued the Countess of Desborough; "and hitherto I have been inclined to join in the common hatred which animates the aristocracy against them. But hear me, Prince of Wales, hear me while I solemnly proclaim and declare that I now cease to wonder that men should desire to abolish monarchy and level thrones, when I think how vile, corrupt, and profligate kings and princes generally are. And now," she added, abruptly turning toward the door, "you will detain me at your peril."

"The door is locked," said the prince, with a smile in which vindictive malignity and gloating licentiousness were strangely commingled. "I was concealed behind it when you entered and, expecting a scene, I took the precaution to secure it."

Thus speaking, he leaned upon the mantelpiece and surveyed the countess with the insolent freedom of a libertine and the cowardly menace of a bully.

"You are a villain!" she exclaimed, her face, neck, and bosom becoming scarlet with indignation. "Suffer me to

depart, or I will no longer hesitate to raise my voice and summon assistance by my screams."

"The shrillest scream and the loudest shriek," said the Prince of Wales, in a tone of cold and ferocious triumph, "will not penetrate beyond these four walls. There are double casements to those windows; between this inner door and the outer one there is an antechamber. Scream, then, shriek, beauteous Eleanor, and all will be in vain!"

"Then will I resist you with my teeth, my nails," exclaimed the countess, her eyes shooting forth fiery arrows upon the prince.

"Never have you appeared to me more lovely, more enchanting, more desirable than now," said his Royal Highness, perfectly unmoved by that threat. "Your cheeks blush a more delicious red with the fury of indignation, your eyes are as bright as meteors, your lips are of a livelier scarlet, and the teeth shine between them like dazzling pearls. Oh, you are a divine, a heavenly creature, Eleanor, dearest Eleanor; far, far more beauteous at this moment than when you lay reclining in my arms upon the sofa at your own dwelling, and when I might have become the master of your charms had opportunity then served. In the name of God, why not manifest equal kindness toward me now? Wherefore compel me to wrest by force those enjoyments which it were paradise to have yielded voluntarily?"

"I confess that there was a time when, in a moment of weakness, I forgot my own dignity in your presence," said the countess; "but, thank heaven! your triumph was not complete, nor shall it ever be!"

"And yet the proud and haughty Eleanor cannot look me in the face and declare that she has never proved faithless to her husband, never embraced a lover in her arms," exclaimed the Prince of Wales, fixing a searching look upon the lady's countenance.

"What mean you? What —"

And Eleanor, gasping for breath, supported herself by clinging to the mantel.

"Ah! then my surmise was not wrong?" cried the prince, in a triumphant tone. "Oh, I am well acquainted with the world, Eleanor, well experienced in the female heart. The moment I learned ere now that you had yielded to the

device set to ensnare you, I felt assured that it was a conscious guilt which had made you coward enough to seek to know more. Were you an innocent woman, against whom scandal could not even raise its breath, you would have treated Mrs. Brace and her intrigues with disdain. Nay, those intrigues would have appeared so transparent that you must have seen through them in a moment."

"You are adding the grossest insult to the most wanton injury," murmured the unhappy Eleanor, her courage and presence of mind failing her rapidly.

"Had you not treated me with insult on that night when you promised to admit me to your chamber," said the prince, "there never would have been a word or a look of anger or disagreement between us. But, because a certain incident took place, as unforeseen as it was unfortunate, you barred your door against me. Think you, haughty lady, that I had no feelings to wound, no bitter disappointment to endure? Assuredly I had; and it was in consequence of the cruel, heartless, capricious treatment which I then experienced at your hands that I resolved to make you mine, sooner or later. And now, Lady Desborough, since it appears to be my turn to speak at length," he continued, in a tone of enhanced triumph, "I crave your attention."

"My God! suffer me to depart!" exclaimed the unhappy lady, glancing in wild terror around the room.

"Listen, I say!" cried the prince, emphatically. "Upon my absence from the ballrooms no one will dare to comment; upon your absence, on the contrary, strange whispers and remarks will speedily circulate. The absence of both of us at the same time cannot fail to engender certain suspicions; and I leave you to judge whether they will be more prejudicial to you or to me. Now, beautiful Eleanor, do you begin to see the position in which you are placed?"

"And despair nerves me with courage!" suddenly ejaculated the lovely woman, who did indeed appear lovelier still in her indignation. "You may keep me a prisoner here, Prince of Wales," she cried, darting looks of defiance at the heir apparent; "but I take God to witness that, be the consequences what they may, the first use I shall make of my liberty will be to hasten into the presence of a magistrate or a judge and demand whether there be no law to reach even your Royal Highness."

You are talking nonsense, utter nonsense, Eleanor," said George, his lips curling with contempt. "In the first place, kings, queens, princes, and princesses may do just what they please, for they are above the law and stronger than the law; and the law was only made to keep the millions in subjection to them. Think you, then, that magistrates or judges would dare to entertain a charge against a prince? No, no; they would sooner hang ten thousand innocent working men than even venture upon a reprimand to a guilty scion of royalty."

"But if you detain me here, by force, against my will," exclaimed Eleanor, "the scandal, the shame, the infamy that will result —"

"Can all be dispersed and set at rest in a moment," interrupted his Royal Highness, with a promptitude showing that he had well considered the subject. "For how stands the matter? Mrs. Brace will step forward and declare that she managed the whole intrigue; that the Countess of Desborough of her own accord proceeded to a certain bed-chamber where she met the Prince of Wales, and that it is a mere maudlin sentiment of compunction, or else a feeling of jealousy, which makes her turn around upon her royal paramour to denounce him. There, Eleanor, the story is cut and dried, all in readiness; and you see that everything can be accounted for as naturally as possible."

"Yes, I indeed perceive that you are capable of any villainy," exclaimed the countess, darting a look of deadly hatred upon the Prince of Wales. "I already knew you to be profligate, extravagant, selfish, ungrateful, and heartless; but it was reserved for the incident of this night to teach me that you are a villain."

"The sooner I close that abusive mouth with kisses the better," cried the prince, with a voice and look of vindictive triumph; and, extending his arms, he rushed toward the countess.

"Hold!" ejaculated a full-toned female voice; and from behind the curtains of the bed stepped forth a lady whose flashing eyes, crimson countenance, and quivering lips proclaimed a rage not easy to be appeased.

It was Mrs. Fitzherbert!

A cry of joy and triumph burst from the lips of the Countess of Desborough; but a terrible oath, an imprecation so fear-

ful that we dare not attempt to record it, fell from the tongue of the Prince of Wales.

"Madam, you have doubtless heard all that has passed between his Royal — I mean, between this man," exclaimed Eleanor, pointing disdainfully and loathingly at the prince, "and myself?"

"Yes, every syllable," answered Mrs. Fitzherbert, darting furious glances on the heir apparent, who folded his arms, leaned against the mantel, and endeavoured to assume an air of indifference.

"You will therefore agree with me, madam," continued the countess, "that I have been subjected to an outrage as vile as the spirit which suggested it must be cowardly and despicable?"

"We will not use hard words, if your ladyship pleases," said Mrs. Fitzherbert, bending a severe look upon Eleanor; "for, according to one portion of the dialogue which ere now took place between yourself and his Royal Highness, it would appear that he has received some considerable amount of encouragement on the part of your ladyship. Nay, it would even seem," she added, with a caustic emphasis, "that on one particular occasion his Royal Highness should have become the partner of your ladyship's bed, had not some unforeseen incident prevented so agreeable a result."

"Madam," said the Countess of Desborough, recovering all her dignity, and fixing her magnificent eyes with grand effect upon Mrs. Fitzherbert, "if you yourself be immaculate, then wherefore is it that you are not styled her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales? But if, on the other hand, you have no claim to that distinction, how dare you undertake the part of moralist with me? Tell me that you are the wife of his Royal Highness, and you will then bring a blush to my cheek, and I shall fall upon my knees and implore your pardon for ever having wronged you in thought, though never in deed; but if you be only Mrs. Fitzherbert, the mistress of the heir apparent —"

"Silence, madam!" cried the lady whom Eleanor thus boldly addressed in such words of sarcasm. Then, stamping her foot imperiously, Mrs. Fitzherbert drew herself up to her full height, and, in a tone and manner of the loftiest dignity, she exclaimed, "It is time that your ladyship should learn

whom you have insulted and outraged, for I am indeed her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales!"

"My God! what have you said? What madness have you perpetrated?" exclaimed the heir apparent, suddenly becoming fearfully excited; and, seizing Mrs. Fitzherbert, for so we had better continue to call her, inasmuch as she was never known by any higher name to the world, seizing her by the wrist, we say, the prince muttered in a low, hoarse, and thick tone, "I am aware that my conduct has been bad this evening toward you; but your vengeance is terrible in the extreme! For by proclaiming yourself to be my wife, you have endangered my very heritage of the British crown!"

A deadly pallor came over the countenance of Mrs. Fitzherbert, as she was thus painfully reminded of the tremendous indiscretion of which she had been guilty; but almost instantly recovering her presence of mind, she took the Countess of Desborough's hands in both her own, saying, "Let us pardon each other for the harsh words which we have exchanged — and let us henceforth be friends."

"Oh, cheerfully, cheerfully," cried the generous-hearted Eleanor, in a tone of fervent sincerity. "Your Royal Highness —"

"Hush!" exclaimed the other; "you must never fail to call me Mrs. Fitzherbert. I will not ask you to swear to keep this secret, because I know that your ladyship is a woman of honour, and it would be an insult to exact a vow to that effect; but I will implore you, by that friendship which I now proffer you and which I ask you to vouchsafe me in return —"

"Fear not, dear lady, that I shall ever breathe a word calculated to give you offence," interrupted the Countess of Desborough. Then, without deigning even to notice the Prince of Wales, she said, "You will have the kindness to accompany me back to the ballrooms; so that, if my absence has been perceived, it may be supposed that I have been in your society during the interval."

"Certainly," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, instantly recognizing the prudence of the step thus suggested. Then, turning toward the Prince of Wales, she said, in a cold tone of reproach, "Have you no apology to offer to this generous-hearted lady?"

"The Countess of Desborough will accept none at my hands," said the heir apparent, doggedly.

"It were a miserable affectation on my part; indeed, it would amount to a piece of sycophancy of which I am utterly incapable," observed Eleanor, "were I to declare that any apology, however humble, could appease the indignation which I experience. On that head, therefore, my dear Mrs. Fitzherbert, let no more be said. Henceforth the Prince of Wales will treat me with ceremonious courtesy, and I shall behave toward him with reserved and cold respect. Let such be the understanding; and on that condition, I shall never breathe a word relative to the incidents of this night. And it will be the fault of his Royal Highness," she added, significantly, "if I do not carry the secret thereof to my grave."

"I understand your ladyship," said the prince, assuming a stern and haughty air; "but be well assured that, after everything which has passed in this chamber within the last half-hour, I am now led to hate you as cordially as ever I felt interested in you."

"The hatred of your Royal Highness will prove much more tolerable to me than your love," exclaimed Eleanor, the natural pride and dignity of her sex dictating this cutting taunt.

And the prince felt the withering sarcasm and writhed under it, although he affected to turn aside and hum an opera air. But, oh, for him, the worshipped, idolized, and deified heir apparent, to be thus treated with indifference, for him, the handsomest man and most fascinating gentleman in Europe, to be thus spurned, as it were, by that indignant and haughty but noble-minded lady, oh, it was intolerable; and the very tune which he affected to hum hissed between his lips like a reptile's craving for vengeance.

But, without waiting to observe the result which her retort had produced, the Countess of Desborough unlocked the door, threw it open, and made way for Mrs. Fitzherbert to pass. But this lady whispered, with a half-smile, "Remember that I am not to be known by you as the Princess of Wales;" and the countess accordingly went forth first, Mrs. Fitzherbert following close behind.

The antechamber was traversed, and Eleanor was about

to open the outer door, when the Prince of Wales suddenly exclaimed, "Stop for a single moment!"

The two ladies paused accordingly; but Mrs. Fitzherbert only turned toward him.

And it was to her that a sudden idea had prompted him to utter a few words.

"You are about to seek again the company whom I have invited to Carlton House this evening," he said, in a low and impressive tone. "Now, it either becomes necessary for me to return amongst them also, or for you to circulate a rumour of sudden indisposition as a plea for my absence."

"And wherefore can you not return to the ballrooms — presently?" demanded Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a cold tone, and with a strong emphasis upon the last word, as much as to imply that he must not think of offering to accompany herself and Eleanor, as his presence would not be otherwise than displeasing to the latter.

"Yes, I will return presently," said the prince, "if I am assured that I shall not become the focus for your angry looks."

"Would you have me very amiable toward you?" demanded Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a tone of bitter irony. "Oh, you deserve it —"

"Perdition! begone — leave me!" ejaculated his Royal Highness; and retreating, in a towering rage, into the bed-chamber, he slammed the door violently.

"Come, dear Lady Desborough," said Mrs. Fitzherbert, exercising wonderful command over her feelings, "we must saunter back to the ballrooms with countenances as serene and smiling as if nothing unusual had occurred. It may be that some of my friends have been to seek me in my own apartments, and we will therefore say, if questioned, that we have visited the picture-gallery. By the bye, that young lady whom you introduced this evening is a sweet pretty creature," observed Mrs. Fitzherbert, casting a rapid and searching glance at Eleanor's countenance, in order to ascertain if there had been any particular motive in presenting Pauline Clarendon to the prince.

"She is not only beautiful, but as amiable and virtuous as she is lovely," said the countess. "In a few weeks she will become Lady Florimel."

“ So much the better,” thought Mrs. Fitzherbert, “ for the prince was certainly struck with her.”

But she did not breathe these sentiments aloud; and now the two ladies once more entered the glittering sphere of beauty, rank, and fashion.

Mrs. Fitzherbert’s intimate knowledge of the prince’s disposition enabled her to judge that he would not return to the ballrooms again that night, but that he would retire to his own apartments and drown his disappointment, rage, and humiliation in the bottle or the punch-bowl. She accordingly spread the report that his Royal Highness had been seized with a sudden indisposition; and the entertainment therefore broke up at an earlier hour than it would otherwise have done.

CHAPTER XXVI

A STRANGE VISITRESS — A WELCOME PROPOSAL

THE scene now changes to Mr. Clarendon's house in Cavendish Square.

It was about half-past ten o'clock in the morning, breakfast was over, and the father, leaving his two lovely daughters in the parlour, retired to a room which had been fitted up as his library or study.

Mr. Clarendon's countenance has already been described as thin, sallow, and having an indelible stamp of melancholy traced upon its lineaments; but it now appeared actually care-worn and expressed all the indications of a mind ill at ease. Nevertheless, in the presence of his daughters he assumed a certain appearance of gaiety, or rather of composure and tranquillity, which led them to believe that he had nought to vex or annoy him; and it was only when alone that his features fell, as it were, into an aspect mournfully harmonizing with the real state of his thoughts.

Thus was it on the morning of which we are writing, and which was the one following the grand entertainment at Carlton House; for, having chatted at the breakfast-table with his daughters in a manner that might be termed almost cheerful, he retired to his library to give way to the most melancholy reflections.

Indeed, Mrs. Brace, the wily milliner of Pall Mall, had not been misled by her worldly experience when she conjectured, without ever having seen Mr. Clarendon in her life, that he felt his present position to be altogether a false one.

And such it indeed was; for he had only been acknowledged as a relative and well treated by Lord Marchmont at a time when circumstances seemed to proclaim him as the heir to the old peerage and the fine estates which were the

appanage of that rank; but now that the Honourable Arthur Eaton was completely recovered from his perilous and mysterious malady, it had already struck Mr. Clarendon that Lord Marchmont was growing colder and colder toward him each time they met. True it was that Arthur's manner became more friendly and cordial, if possible, every day, and he was almost a diurnal visitor at the house in Cavendish Square; but still the young gentleman's amiability recompensed not Mr. Clarendon for the old lord's increasing indifference.

What, then, was to be done? To return to his cottage and his comparative penury, was an idea too galling for Mr. Clarendon to entertain for many minutes at a time, although there were occasions when he did contemplate it seriously, considering it to be preferable to the painful alternative of living, as it were, upon a species of eleemosynary charity, or, at all events, in an utter dependence on his haughty relative. But, no, he could not calmly and deliberately consent to abandon the improved position in which circumstances had placed him after so long and severe a struggle with the world. Besides, was not Pauline engaged to marry a young peer of immense wealth, and might not Octavia hope to form an equally brilliant match?

So at least Mr. Clarendon thought; and, looking upon the world and all its denizens with that distrust which a long series of misfortunes invariably engenders in the human mind, he feared lest his daughters' prospects should be ruined were his own position in society to undergo any alteration for the worst. He knew not that Florimel, for instance, had loved Pauline when she was an obscure, humble, and unknown maiden, or that he now loved her for her own sake alone; on the contrary, he fancied that if Pauline were to return to the villa in the Edgeware Road and lay aside her silk dress to resume a cotton one, she would not then appear sufficiently beautiful in the young nobleman's eyes to compensate her for her own want of fortune and the penury of her sire.

These considerations, therefore, induced Mr. Clarendon to cling to the position in which Lord Marchmont had so suddenly, and under such peculiar circumstances, placed him; but still he felt that it was a position not only false and embarrassing, but even cruel. For the allowance of a thousand

a year might be withdrawn by Lord Marchmont in any moment of caprice; and even if it were continued until this old nobleman's death, there might be no stipulation in his will to ensure its subsequent payment. True it was that Arthur Eaton appeared to have conceived a great attachment toward the Clarendon family; but he was young, he might marry, and thus bestow his sympathies elsewhere, or a thousand other circumstances might tend to induce him to stop the pecuniary allowance now made.

All these considerations were perplexing and vexatious enough; but even that did not constitute the sum of Mr. Clarendon's painful reflections. For was it a small thing that a peerage should have been snatched, as it were, from his very grasp? Was it a trifling matter that a coronet should have descended to within an inch of his brow and then have been suddenly withdrawn? Yet such was the fact. A few weeks back, and Arthur Eaton appeared to hover on the very verge of the grave. Death seemed to hold him in his grasp, and thus the frailest, weakest barrier in the world alone stood between Mr. Clarendon and the heirship apparent to the Marchmont title and estates.

But how speedily was the aspect of circumstances changed! Death released its hold upon the victim who seemed past all human redemption; and Arthur Eaton was rapidly returning to a new and vigorous state of existence. Mr. Clarendon's hopes, at one time so brilliant, were thus doomed to experience a terrible annihilation; and it was not without the bitterest pangs and the most intense secret anguish that this man, naturally ambitious and of an aristocratic mind, beheld the downfall of that glorious fabric which circumstances had justified his imagination in building up.

Upon retiring to his library on the morning whereof we are now writing, Mr. Clarendon fell into the train of thoughts which we have just sketched; and in this painful reverie had he been wrapped for nearly half an hour, when a domestic entered to announce that a lady, who refused to give her name, desired an immediate interview with him.

He ordered the servant to show the visitress into the library; and when she made her appearance, he was immediately struck by the mingled elegance, dignity, and grace which characterized her form; but her countenance Mr. Clarendon could not see, for it was carefully concealed by a

thick black veil so folded as to render it impossible to catch a glimpse of the features through the transparency of the lace.

That she was young, he had not the slightest doubt, for her figure possessed all the symmetry of youthfulness. The waist was very slender, the shoulders had a fine width and an admirable slope, the bust was well formed without being exuberant, and she walked with that lightness yet firmness of step which finely proportioned limbs can alone command. Besides, her feet and ankles, peeping beneath her dark silk dress, were small even to a fault, and the hands, though imprisoned in black kid gloves, were evidently modelled with a corresponding delicacy and perfection.

Mr. Clarendon placed a chair for her accommodation; and, resuming his own seat, he waited with no inconsiderable degree of curiosity for the first words that should fall from her lips.

"Scarcely knowing how to introduce the object of my visit, Mr. Clarendon," said the veiled lady, in a voice rich with all the soft melody and beautiful with all the harmonious freshness of youth, "I must commence by apologizing for this intrusion. But you will pardon me if I neither reveal my name nor raise my veil upon the present occasion. Indeed, my business with you is full of mystery —"

"But of what nature is that business, miss — or madam — for I know not by which distinction to address you," interrupted Mr. Clarendon, not altogether liking the opening scene in this strange interview.

"Call me miss, if you will," said the lady. "And do not," she immediately exclaimed, "imbibe any hasty notion to my prejudice, on account of the mystery with which it at present suits me to envelop myself. It may be that we shall become far more intimately connected; on the other hand, it may be that we shall part presently, never to meet again."

"And on what do these alternatives depend?" inquired Mr. Clarendon, a strange and unaccountable feeling coming over him, a feeling made up of something more than mingled surprise, curiosity, and suspense, — one of those mystic and superhuman sensations, in fine, which visit us but once or twice during our lives, but which, when they do shed their influence over us, seem to warn us that we have reached some

point or crisis in our destiny which will decide the whole current and channel of the future flow of existence.

"You ask on what those alternatives depend?" repeated the veiled lady; and Mr. Clarendon knew by her attitude and manner that she was fixing her eyes upon him searchingly through her veil. "They depend solely on yourself," she added, after a pause of nearly a minute.

"Madam, allow me to tell you frankly that the mystery which you are adopting begins to be irksome and embarrassing to me," said Mr. Clarendon. "If you wish to speak to me on some private matter, I will pledge my word most sacredly and my honour most solemnly to look upon the communication as confidential and secret."

"And if that communication were of a startling character?" said the lady, in a tone of inquiry.

"These are times when it requires a great deal to startle anybody," responded Mr. Clarendon.

"Am I to understand that your experience of the world is such as to render it difficult either to startle or shock you?" demanded the mysterious unknown.

"I need not hesitate to answer you in the affirmative," said Mr. Clarendon, who failed not to comprehend that his visitress was seeking for encouragement to proceed. "Yes, my acquaintance with the world is not of the most pleasant description; and I have seen enough to convince me that heartlessness and selfishness thrive the best, while generosity and honour fall lamentably into the background. I liken generosity to a man who commits slow suicide by means of infinitesimal doses of poison, which, however, must prove eventually fatal; for generosity ruins and destroys itself, to reap nothing but ingratitude. As for honour, 'tis a mere word," added Mr. Clarendon, with intense bitterness, "which every man and every class of men interpret differently."

"Ah! now I begin to understand you better, and I am glad that you have made these observations," said the lady. "You have evidently been taught by experience to look upon the world as the arena in which selfish interests wage a more terrible conflict than that of the Roman gladiators. And you are right, Mr. Clarendon. But, having adopted these views, you would doubtless feel grateful to any one who might point out the means of ameliorating your own condition?"

"By heaven! I would worship such a friend as if it were an angel sent from heaven!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon. Then, almost repenting of the enthusiasm into which his feelings had at the moment betrayed him, he said, in a different and colder tone, "But wherefore do you put such strange questions to me? If you know aught of my circumstances —"

"I know everything!" interrupted the veiled visitress. "I am well acquainted with all the details of your position, and I am convinced, after the admissions you have already made, that it is painful and intolerable to a degree."

"But it may be dangerous for me to make further admissions to you, lady," suddenly exclaimed Mr. Clarendon, fearful that he had been guilty of some imprudence in expressing with such freedom his ideas of the world and the views resulting from his experience of it. "Before we continue a discourse which has taken so strange a turn, permit me to inquire who you are?"

"I have already warned you that it will neither suit my purposes to reveal my name nor raise my veil upon the present occasion," said the lady, in a firm and decisive tone. "Indeed, our interview may as well end here," she added, rising abruptly from her seat. Then, again appearing to scan Mr. Clarendon's features with an earnest attention through her closely folded veil, she observed, in a low, solemn, and mysterious tone, "That you are discontented, I perceive; but whether you have the courage to undertake the work which can alone place you on that eminence to which your ambition aspires, I am unable at present to judge. If you do indeed possess that courage, I am willing to aid you upon certain conditions. Therefore, whether we shall meet again must depend upon yourself. For the remainder of this week and throughout the next shall I each morning look into the *Times* newspaper. If no communication be made to me through its advertising columns, I shall conclude that you are a mere grumbler who dares not act, a poltroon who can complain, but who lacks the energy necessary to improve his condition and accomplish his desires. On the other hand, if a communication should appear in that journal, addressed to the 'Veiled Lady,' it will instantaneously be attended to. Farewell."

And, with this abrupt peroration, the mysterious visitress

quitted the room, leaving Mr. Clarendon so completely a prey to the profoundest amazement that he remained fixed, as it were, in his chair, unable to rise and perform the usual courteous ceremony of opening the door of the apartment or ringing the bell for a domestic to attend upon her egress from the house.

By degrees Mr. Clarendon recovered from the stupor of surprise and bewilderment into which he had been thrown by the closing scene of that strange interview; and he then began to reflect, with an intense and absorbing interest, on everything which had fallen from the lady's lips. He passed in review all the details of her remarks; he weighed her words with a minute carefulness; he considered all the possible bearings and every probable tendency which they might have. It was not difficult to perceive that she was well acquainted with his position; and she had also managed to probe the nature of his secret thoughts to no mean depth.

But who was she, and what assistance could she possibly lend Mr. Clarendon in order to raise him to that eminence to which his ambition aspired? For, in order to gratify that ambition, the coronet of a peer must be placed upon his brow; and who was this lady that could render him an aid so efficient as to reach so grand a consummation?

Unable to form even the remotest or wildest conjecture in this respect, Mr. Clarendon was relapsing into that bewilderment of the ideas from which he had just managed to emerge, when the door opened, and the Honourable Mr. Eaton was announced.

Wonderful was the change which had recently taken place in this young gentleman. The ruddy glow of health was upon his cheeks; his eyes had lost all their wild and feverish brilliancy, and shone with a natural lustre; his lips were of a wholesome red; and his figure, modelled in slight proportions, had lost its attenuation, debility, and appearance of caducity. Instead of the worn-out and emaciated being he had so lately seemed, he was now a fine young man, remarkably handsome, and possessed of every personal attraction calculated to touch the female heart, as he was also endowed with every mental quality to enable him to win and retain it.

"Mr. Clarendon," said Arthur, when the usual complimentary greetings were exchanged, "I have paid my respects to you in the first instance this morning, because I

am anxious to have a few moments' conversation with you before I join my fair cousins. The truth is," continued the Honourable Mr. Eaton, his countenance assuming a certain seriousness, though not of an expression which heralded any bad tidings, "the truth is, I wish to put one candid question to you, in the hope of receiving as frank a reply."

"Proceed, my dear Arthur," said Mr. Clarendon, somewhat amazed at the singularity of this prefatory observation. "I am convinced you cannot for an instant suppose that any frankness on your part will be met otherwise than with a congenial ingenuousness on mine."

"Oh, assuredly not, my dear sir," exclaimed Eaton, whose voice of rich masculine melody contrasted strangely with the weak and enfeebled tones in which he had so recently been wont to speak, when labouring under the fatal effects of the slow poison, *alias* the Heir's Friend. "But you are well aware," he continued, "that when a person wishes to enter upon a delicate and confidential subject, he prefaces it with some precautionary remarks which are, nevertheless, in most instances unnecessary and uncalled for."

"And you are desirous of speaking to me on a delicate and confidential subject?" said Mr. Clarendon, wondering what on earth could be the topic thus mysteriously alluded to.

"Yes: are you surprised?" demanded Arthur, with a smile. "But not to keep you any longer in suspense, my dear Mr. Clarendon, I will at once frankly inform you that it is respecting your older daughter, the charming Octavia —"

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, his countenance lighting up with a satisfaction which he could not conceal; for it instantaneously struck him that Arthur Eaton was about to demand Octavia's hand in marriage, and, with the rapidity of lightning, did his thoughts calculate all the advantages of such a connection, — advantages, indeed, which would go far toward putting an end to that falseness of position in which Mr. Clarendon was situated with regard to the Marchmont family.

"In one word, then, my dear sir," resumed Arthur, after a moment's pause, "do you believe that Miss Clarendon's affections are disengaged?"

"Certainly, most assuredly!" exclaimed Mr. Clarendon, not for an instant deeming it possible that his daughter could

be in love without his knowing it. "I acquainted you yesterday with the pleasing intelligence that Lord Florimel had on the previous day formally demanded my permission to pay his addresses to Pauline; but Octavia is as yet 'fancy free,' as Shakespeare terms the virginity of the affections," added Mr. Clarendon, little suspecting how tremendously he erred in his belief and how completely he was deceived in that respect.

"You are certain that Octavia has formed no preference amongst the circle of her acquaintance?" said Arthur Eaton, inquiringly.

"I feel convinced that she has not," responded Mr. Clarendon, really believing what he was saying. "But wherefore have you asked me the same question twice?"

"Simply because I would guard myself against proceeding in error or misconception," answered the young gentleman. "There have been moments, especially lately, when it has struck me that Octavia was pensive, thoughtful —"

"I can assure you that I have noticed nothing of the kind," interrupted Mr. Clarendon, emphatically; "and, even if she does seem preoccupied now and then, I will stake my existence it is not in consequence of any attachment secretly formed. Oh, no, she would conceal nothing from me."

"As her father, you must decidedly know best," said Arthur. "Taking it for granted, then, that Miss Clarendon's affections are disengaged," he continued, in a tone of manly firmness, "I demand your permission to seek an interview with her for the purpose of offering her my hand."

"My dear Arthur," exclaimed Mr. Clarendon, his sallow countenance becoming radiant with joy, "I am delighted, nay, so overcome by this unlooked-for, this unexpected happiness, that I am at a loss for words to convey all I feel—"

"Then I have your permission," interrupted the young gentleman, pressing his relative's hands with cordial warmth; "and I shall hasten to avail myself of it."

"Go, dear Arthur, go!" cried Mr. Clarendon, almost pushing him toward the door of the library. "You will find your cousins in the parlour, and Octavia will feel herself honoured and happy in the preference which you thus manifest in her favour, when the fashionable world abounds in heiresses amongst whom you might select and choose at will."

But the latter portion of this sentence was lost upon Arthur Eaton, who, anxious to perform what he considered to be a duty, was already crossing the threshold of the library on his way to the parlour.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SISTERS

WHEN breakfast was over, on the morning of which we are writing, and when Mr. Clarendon had left his daughters together, as already described at the commencement of the preceding chapter, Pauline took her sister's hand and gazed so long and with a look so full of tenderness upon her countenance, that the latter suddenly felt assured either that something was amiss or that a revelation of importance was about to be made.

"My dearest Pauline," she exclaimed, "there is a peculiarity in your manner this morning —"

"Which alarms you, Octavia?" interrupted the younger sister, finishing the other's sentence for her. "But tranquillize yourself —"

"Ah! then you have some evil tidings to communicate, Pauline?" suddenly ejaculated Octavia, the colour disappearing from her cheeks. "Is it concerning yourself, or relative to me, my beloved sister? Speak, oh, speak quickly, and keep me not in suspense."

"Hush! not so loud! — we may be overheard," said Pauline, endeavouring to calm her sister's excitement. Then, placing herself by Octavia's side, she murmured, in a tremulous tone, and taking her hand, "It almost breaks my heart to have anything disagreeable to unfold to you —"

"My God! what do you mean?" demanded the elder Miss Clarendon, her anxiety and suspense now becoming utterly intolerable. "Oh, you are weeping, Pauline, you are weeping!" she exclaimed, throwing a look of wild excitement upon her sister. "The tears are raining down your cheeks, and it is for me that they fall. Tell me, dear Pauline, what has happened?"

"I conjure you to tranquillize yourself, Octavia," said Pauline, embracing her sister tenderly. "You know how devotedly I love you, how much I would undergo to save you a single pang —"

"And it is the same with me, Pauline," interrupted Octavia. "Feeling our motherless condition, we have ever loved each other with the fondest and most tender affection; and it is now by this affection, by this love, Pauline, that I conjure you to relieve me from suspense —"

"I will, I will," exclaimed the younger sister, whose cheeks were flushed with grief, as those of Octavia were pale with apprehension. "You believed that I went to the opera last night, and it was not so."

"Then whither did you go?" inquired Octavia, amazement for an instant absorbing the intensity of her excitement; and she fixed her magnificent blue eyes upon Pauline's countenance.

"There was a grand entertainment at Carlton House last evening," began the younger Miss Clarendon, "and —"

"And you obtained an introduction thither?" exclaimed Octavia, a terrible tremor now coming over her, at the same time that an awful suspicion of the truth swept in upon her startled soul.

"Yes, I went to Carlton House," continued Pauline, "determined to clear up the dreadful mystery. And, oh, my beloved sister, my wronged, lost, betrayed Octavia —"

But, suffocated by her grief, Pauline stopped short; and, throwing herself upon her sister's neck, she wept convulsively.

"I understand it all. My God! I understand it all!" murmured Octavia, falling back upon the sofa, with her affectionate and kind-hearted sister clinging to her in the wildest paroxysm of grief.

A minute passed, and no sound fell from Octavia's lips; motionless likewise was she.

As the searing lightning darts vivid and sudden through the night of storm, and rain, and tempest, so, amidst the tumultuous anguish of Pauline's heart, did the blasting thought that Octavia was dead flash across her imagination.

Starting from the convulsive embrace in which she was holding her sister, starting thence, we say, as if suddenly impelled away by an irresistible galvanic shock, Pauline threw a terrified look on Octavia's countenance.

The unhappy young lady was not dead, nor even in a swoon; but she was stunned, stupefied, paralyzed by the weight of ineffable misery.

Spellbound, as if under the incantation of some hellish spirit, was she.

And all in a moment she had passed through the most torturing phase of her existence, she had endured the crucifixion of that indescribable anguish which accompanies the sudden annihilation of the heart's fondest hopes, and she had as rapidly sunk into that species of stupor which is a palsy alike of the heart and of the brain.

Her eyes glared vacantly, her mouth was half-open, her bosom stood upheaved with the suspended breath.

"Octavia — my sister — my beloved sister!" exclaimed Pauline, wildly. "In the name of God, speak to me."

These words, uttered with all the passionate enthusiasm of the young maiden's fervent love and rending grief, seemed suddenly to break that spell which held Octavia in a waking, statue-like trance.

Deep sighs of returning breath broke from her, convulsing her bosom fearfully; and as the blood flowed back into the veins, the excruciating sense of bitter, bitter anguish returned to the heart. Then the eyes, like two arteries of the soul suddenly opening, poured forth their pearly torrents; and the pent-up agonies of Octavia's tremendous affliction found a vent, affording that relief which ever follows tears, even in the midst of the direst woe that the human breast can possibly experience.

And Pauline suffered her to weep uninterruptedly for many minutes.

"I need not ask you to describe in words the terrible truth which my heart's worst fears have already made me comprehend, alas! too well," said the wretched Octavia, at length breaking the silence which prevailed; and, raising her tear-bedewed countenance toward Pauline's, she added, in a low and scarcely audible tone, "I should have been better prepared for this cruel blow!"

"Yes, my beloved sister," answered Pauline; "for I know that you have recently experienced many sad misgivings and painful forebodings —"

"But it is so hard to abandon those delicious hopes which are indeed necessary to one's existence," exclaimed

Octavia, in a voice fraught with the terrible accents of despair.

"Remember, my dearest sister," said Pauline, her tone suddenly becoming hoarse, thick, and almost ferocious, "remember," she repeated, more emphatically than at first, "that the Prince of Wales is now undeserving of your love. But if you should still feel that your heart clings to his image —"

"My God! how can I ever efface that image from my soul?" exclaimed Octavia, now gazing in astonishment upon Pauline. "What, my dear sister, do you suppose that I can pluck forth this love of mine from my heart, as if it were a flower which his faithless hand had placed in my bosom, and trample it underfoot? Oh, no, no: it were impossible! Look into the depths of your own soul, Pauline, consider well the nature of that affection which you bear for Gabriel, and then tell me whether it is something which you can break like glass, snap like a twig, or crush like a delicate rosebud."

"No, no, it is not," murmured Pauline, her voice becoming soft and tremulous again; "and I was wrong, or rather, foolish, to hope for an instant that you could so easily triumph over your heart's fondest affections. But tell me, my dear sister, tell me how you mean to act —"

"Did you speak to — to — him last night?" inquired Octavia, in a stifling voice.

"Yes, and he offered to make any reparation which lay in his power," responded Pauline.

"What reparation can he make?" exclaimed Octavia, bitterly. "He found my heart a temple prepared for the holiest, sincerest, most impassioned worship which ever constituted the love that woman bears for man, and he has left that heart a ruin. Oh, my beloved sister, counsel, advise, instruct me; for I have no friend on earth in whom I can confide save thou."

And, with tears again streaming from her eyes, Octavia threw herself upon the bosom of Pauline.

"I know not what course to recommend. My God! I am as much bewildered as yourself," exclaimed the latter, as she clasped her unhappy sister in an embrace which love and grief rendered convulsively passionate.

"But does he love me, or has his affection subsided?"

asked Octavia, slowly raising her head and looking intently upon Pauline's countenance. "Oh, you do not answer me, you avert your eyes, and your manner convinces me that even his very love is dead!"

"No, no, Octavia," exclaimed Pauline, emphatically, "I do not mean you to understand that! But if his affection for you be ever so strong, you cannot enjoy it in honour to yourself. Ah! it was this, it was this that was uppermost in my mind when I averted my looks and dared not answer you. For, listen to me attentively, my well-beloved sister," continued the young lady, wiping her eyes and summoning all her mental energies to her aid.

"Speak, speak," murmured Octavia. "I feel as if you were the elder sister, or as if you were a mother to me; for this cruel blow has sadly changed me within the last quarter of an hour. Speak, then, my dearest Pauline, and your words will console and strengthen me."

"In the first place, Octavia," said the younger Miss Clarendon, "it is absolutely necessary that you should exercise an immense control over your feelings. To this point you must tutor yourself at once, without delay. Our father may return to the room, visitors may be announced unexpectedly, and the strangest suspicions would be excited were we found sad, and weeping, and afflicted thus sorely. Courage, then, dear sister, courage!" exclaimed Pauline; "and nerve yourself to look this tremendous misfortune in the face, to contemplate it with as much calmness as you can call to your aid, to examine it in all its bearings, to study all its tendencies, and to arrive at some settled opinion how to act."

"Yes, yes, I will be calm, I will be tranquil," murmured Octavia, sobbing profoundly between the broken assurances which she thus gave her sister. "But, my God! the calamity is dreadful, Pauline, dear Pauline; and I know not whether it will end in suicide or madness!"

"O heavens! talk not thus wildly, my beloved Octavia!" exclaimed the younger Miss Clarendon, embracing her sister and lavishing upon her the most endearing caresses. "Come, let us converse seriously, quietly, calmly —"

"But have you anything to suggest?" demanded Octavia, hastily, a ray of hope flashing in upon her soul.

"Alas! I am myself almost bewildered," said Pauline.

“And yet there are two alternatives for an injured woman to choose between in your case.”

“Two alternatives!” exclaimed Octavia. “Oh, yes,” she added, bitterly, “I have already mentioned them — madness or suicide!”

“Sister, you will distract me, you will render me unfit to counsel or console you,” cried Pauline. “In the name of God, Octavia,” she exclaimed, throwing her arms around the unhappy young lady’s neck, “do not talk thus, but fulfil your promise.”

“What promise did I make?” inquired Octavia, impatiently.

“That you would be calm and tranquil, that you would listen to me with attention,” said Pauline, in the most endearing tone. “Were we not talking just now of the love which we bear for each other?”

“Yes, dearest Pauline, and I am wrong, very wrong to say anything to distress you,” interrupted Octavia, returning her sister’s caresses. “Now, Pauline, I am calm, indeed I am. I will listen to you with attention, my dear good sister. You were telling me that there are two alternatives for my contemplation. I can see none. My brain whirls — I am bewildered!”

And she laid her head upon Pauline’s shoulder.

“Rest yourself there, my beloved sister,” said the young lady; “and listen while I explain myself to you. Do not interrupt me, but hear me to the end; and I will speak slowly, that you may follow me easily and readily as I proceed, for I can well understand, my poor Octavia, that this blow has fallen with tremendous weight upon your brain. I was saying, then, that there are two alternatives for you to contemplate. The first is to seek redress at the hands of the Prince of Wales, the second is to devour your grief in secret. You may ask me what reparation he can make you, otherwise than by leading you to the altar. I answer emphatically that he can be forced to espouse you!”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Octavia, starting up as if obedient to the sudden influence of a galvanic battery. Then, clasping her hands together, she cried, “No, no, my beloved sister, you are deceiving yourself, you are deceiving me; for did you not just now declare that, even if his affection were still mine, I could not enjoy it in honour to myself.”

"Yes, I spoke thus, in haste, and without remembering at the instant that there was a possibility of adopting ulterior means," said Pauline. "Besides, I was anxious to probe all the varied feelings of your mind —"

"But you have spoken of ulterior means?" interrupted Octavia. "Oh, tell me — keep me not in suspense, dear sister — those means. And yet," she exclaimed, frantically interrupting herself and dashing her open palms wildly against her polished brow, "it were madness to entertain such a hope."

"Not so foolish as you conceive, Octavia," answered Pauline, in a tone of partial triumph. "A secret of the utmost importance is in my keeping, a secret which only became known to me on Sunday last, while I was out walking with Gabriel during your absence at church."

"And that secret?" exclaimed Octavia, anxiously.

"Involves the honour of a lady of the highest rank —"

"But it will not save my honour, Pauline," interrupted the elder sister, bitterly. "Oh, what in the name of Heaven has all this to do with my unhappy case?" she demanded, gazing in astonishment upon Pauline. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that the lady who became a mother at our recent abode, under such mysterious circumstances —"

"Mrs. Mordaunt!" cried Octavia, literally trembling with impatience.

"Yes, Mrs. Mordaunt," repeated Pauline. "And can you guess who this Mrs. Mordaunt really is?"

"How can I, Pauline?" exclaimed the elder sister. "But you remember that we always suspected her to be some lady of rank, and her friend Mrs. Smith, too."

"Nor were we wrong in our conjectures, Octavia," proceeded the younger Miss Clarendon, solemnly; "for, as sure as I am now addressing my words to you, that Mrs. Smith was the high-born, wealthy, and fashionable Countess of Desborough, and Mrs. Mordaunt was her Royal Highness the Princess Sophia!"

"Great heavens! is this possible?" exclaimed Octavia, almost forgetting her own afflictions in the absorbing interest of this tremendous revelation.

"It is not only possible, it is the truth," said Pauline. "I have been introduced to her Royal Highness, and there is no doubt of her identity with our Mrs. Mordaunt. Be-

sides," continued Pauline, "when in conversation with the Prince of Wales relative to yourself, I was anxious to ascertain whether he was acquainted with his sister's frailty, for at the moment I was breathing vague threats into his ear; and the few words which I let drop produced an effect upon him as if a vertigo had suddenly seized on his brain. Then, later in the evening, he asked me, in a tone full of deep meaning, whether Lord Florimel was acquainted with the Princess Sophia's adventure in the Edgeware Road —"

"Yes, yes, I recollect it well," exclaimed Octavia, a sudden reminiscence flashing in upon her brain. "It was from my lips that the Prince of Wales learned the dishonour of his own sister. He questioned me so closely, he forced me to reveal all that had occurred at the villa in connection with the supposed Mrs. Mordaunt and Mrs. Smith, and now I remember that there was something strange and unaccountable in his manner at the time."

"Oh, was it not a species of retribution that he should thus have received the intelligence of his sister's shame from the lips of one whom he himself had dishonoured?" whispered Pauline, in a low and solemn tone. "But you now perceive, my beloved sister, how it is possible that this haughty prince can be made to fall on his knees before you and consent to any sacrifice which you may dictate as the price of secrecy respecting the princess?"

"My God! I dare not employ menaces, Pauline!" exclaimed Octavia, wringing her hands hysterically. "I have loved him too well, still love him too tenderly. And yet," she cried, suddenly interrupting herself, "why should I spare him, since he hesitates not to break my heart? Why should I release him from his vows, if it be indeed within my power to enforce their fulfilment?"

"It is a matter of such vital importance, Octavia," said Pauline, "that you must deliberate on it with far more composure and tranquillity than you can now bring to bear upon the question. Let us cease to speak thereon for the present, and, in the name of everything sacred, study to exercise a control over your feelings."

"I may say that the bitterness of death is past," observed poor Octavia, with difficulty subduing a profound sob. "The worst is now known, the most terrible paroxysm of grief is over, and I must endeavour —"

And scarcely had she time to wipe away the traces of her tears and smooth her charming auburn hair, when the door opened, and the Honourable Arthur Eaton made his appearance.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PROPOSAL

"My sweet cousins," exclaimed the young gentleman, observing that they both started and even exhibited signs of confusion and embarrassment, "if I interrupt you in any very serious discourse, I will at once retire. But really," he added, smiling, "I am at a loss to conceive what you can have to render you both so demure —"

"Nay, come in, Arthur," said Pauline. "You surely are not upon such ceremonial terms with us as to remain standing on the threshold until we invite you to enter."

"On the contrary, my dear cousin," returned Mr. Eaton, "I consider myself on so intimate and friendly a footing in this house, that I at once and unhesitatingly avow my desire to have a few minutes' conversation with your sister in private."

"With me!" ejaculated the elder Miss Clarendon, in amazement.

"Assuredly," answered the young gentleman, with a smile. "Since Pauline has no other sister, I must, of course, mean you."

"And what can you possibly have to say to me in private, Arthur?" exclaimed Octavia, her colour coming and going in rapid alternations, as a thousand conflicting thoughts and fears swept through her mind.

"Nothing very formidable," was the response. "Now, my dear Pauline, I am certain that you will grant my request by leaving me *tête-à-tête* with your sister."

"Oh, certainly, since you are really serious, which I did not think you were at first," exclaimed Pauline; and, darting a look full of kind encouragement upon her sister, she hurried from the room.

"In the name of Heaven, what means all this mystery, Arthur?" demanded Octavia, the moment the door closed behind Pauline.

"You are agitated, trembling from head to foot, apparently overwhelmed with some secret grief, Octavia," exclaimed the young gentleman, heedless of her question, for he was suddenly struck by her excited manner, her changing cheeks, her rapid utterance, and her wild looks. "Tell me, has anything occurred to vex or annoy you? — for you surely can make a confidant of one who feels so deep an interest in your welfare as I."

"No, no, I am not agitated now," said Octavia, exerting all her power and all her strength to regain her self-possession. "I was only startled by the suddenness with which you demanded a private interview. I was fearful that something had happened — to my father, perhaps. But I am composed and tranquil now, Arthur," she added, smiling faintly.

"I am afraid that you are only assuming a tranquillity which you do not in reality experience, Octavia," said the young gentleman, in a tone of deep and touching kindness. "However, I will not seek to penetrate into your feelings. Perhaps the communication which I am about to make will induce you of your own accord to treat me with full confidence. Come, let us sit down, Octavia, and have five minutes' serious conversation together."

Thus speaking, he conducted her to the sofa. Then taking a chair near her, he gazed upon her attentively for a few moments.

"To what is all this to lead?" demanded Octavia, experiencing a vague and unknown terror, and little divining the turn which the conversation was so speedily to take; but she felt, whilst she cast down her blushing face beneath the steadfast yet kind looks of her youthful relative, as if he were acquainted with her secret and was about to proclaim to her ears his knowledge of her amour, her dishonour, and her affliction.

"You ask to what all this is to lead, Octavia," said Arthur, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "as if my visit were an intrusion, as if my presence were unwelcome. Did I indeed interpret your words and manner in a sense so unaccountable on your part and so little flattering to

myself, a seal would at once be placed upon my lips in respect to the communication which I am here to make."

"Pardon, forgive me, Arthur," exclaimed Miss Clarendon, extending her hand toward him. "I have been rude, unkind, eccentric —"

"Say no more upon the subject, Octavia," interrupted Arthur, pressing her fair hand for a moment, and then gently dropping it. "And now listen to me attentively, my fair cousin."

Octavia gazed upon him with more of curiosity and less of terror in her looks; for his words, tone, and manner were kind and reassuring in the extreme.

"You are well aware, my dear cousin," resumed Arthur, "that an unfortunate estrangement existed until lately between your branch of the family and mine. This breach — which, thank God! had nothing to do with either you or me — is now healed between our parents; and the two branches have become, as it were, one family. To speak, however, in a worldly sense, — and I cannot very well avoid touching upon the point, delicate though it be, — your father would naturally be pleased to behold his branch of the family sharing in the honours and enjoying the fortune of the race with which he is connected. Moreover, I have reflected, my dear cousin, that an atonement is due from the branch to which I belong unto yours; and duty, inclination, propriety, and justice have prompted me to take the step which I am about to explain to you."

He paused for a few moments, and fixed his eyes upon Octavia's countenance, to ascertain if she had begun to comprehend his meaning; but so troubled did her brain still feel, after that long and terrible conversation with Pauline, that it was unable to exercise the keenness of perception and the readiness of conjecture which it would have called into play under other circumstances. Thus, bewildered by the prefatory observations which had just been addressed to her, the young lady returned the earnest looks of the Honourable Arthur Eaton with a vacant gaze of surprise, uncertainty, and suspense.

"You do not understand me, Octavia," he said, with a smile; "and I see that I must be more explicit. In a word, I have received from your father not only the assurance that

your affections are disengaged, but likewise his permission to offer you my hand."

"Arthur — you — you — know not what you say — what you do," murmured Miss Clarendon, suddenly thrown completely off her guard by a communication which so vividly and painfully recalled to her memory the love which she cherished for the ingrate prince. Then, darting upon him a look of ineffable anguish, she covered her face with her hands, and, bursting into tears, gave free issue to the pent-up grief which had been swelling for the last few minutes in her bosom.

"My God! Octavia, what ails you? What is the matter?" inquired Arthur, amazed as well as painfully afflicted by this unaccountable and heartrending behaviour of the young lady. "If I have said aught to offend you, Octavia, I implore your forgiveness. I sought to render you happy, and not bring tears from your eyes. But perhaps you love another, and your affection is a secret? Oh, cherish that love, then, Octavia, and think not for a single moment that I would seek to wean you away from the object of such an attachment."

"Spare me, Arthur, spare me!" murmured Miss Clarendon, her whole frame convulsing with an inexpressible grief. "Talk not to me of love —"

"Only one word more, Octavia," interrupted Arthur, "and that I must say, for my own sake, for yours also. Learn, then, that much as I esteem you, deeply as I am interested in your welfare, I do not love you otherwise than as a relative, or as a friend loves a very dear friend. It was not, then, through the heart's tender affection that I demanded your hand, but purely from a sense of duty. My reasons for believing that there was a duty involved in this step I have already explained to you; and you can now comprehend my motives —"

"Oh, yes, I perceive that you are the most generous of men," exclaimed Octavia, all the nobleness of her cousin's intentions and views now bursting upon her mind as a flood of light streams suddenly into a dark cave, illuminating all its recesses. "You would have become my husband in order to make me the sharer of your rank and fortune; so that when Lord Marchmont should be summoned to the tomb, my father might be consoled for the loss of a coronet by

beholding it upon the brow of his daughter. Yes, yes, Arthur Eaton, I comprehend it all now; and again I thank you, oh, how cordially I thank you, for this unparalleled generosity. But it may not be, Arthur," she added, her voice suddenly dropping, and her look bending downward at the same time, whilst a deep crimson glow suffused itself over her countenance and her neck, even unto her bosom.

"You love another, then?" said the young man, and, without waiting for a reply, he exclaimed, "God grant that you may be happy, Octavia."

"Happy!" she repeated, with a sudden start. Then, instantly composing herself, she said in a tone of deep and indescribable feeling, "I thank God, Arthur, that you do not love me; for had I an enemy deserving of my bitterest rancour, I would not wish that he should know what a hopeless attachment is."

"Ah!" ejaculated Eaton, "is it possible, my poor cousin, that your heart cherishes such a blighting love as this?"

"What have I said? What have I told you?" exclaimed Octavia, now perceiving that she had been hurried by her emotions to the vicinage of dangerous ground. "Do not question me any further, do not persist in continuing the discourse upon this topic. I thank you, Arthur, most sincerely thank you, for the honour you have done me and the generosity which you have displayed toward my father and myself; but I beseech you not to press me for any additional explanation respecting the motive which compels me to decline your flattering proposal."

"Not for worlds, Octavia," exclaimed the young man, "would I say or do aught to give you pain. But, ere we take leave of this topic altogether, permit me to make one observation, which I hope you will treasure up in your memory."

"Speak, Arthur," said Miss Clarendon, growing more composed.

"It is that should you ever be placed in a position to require a friend, Octavia — a sincere friend," repeated the Honourable Arthur Eaton, "a friend in whom you might wish to put even more trust than in a brother, hesitate not to send for me, and my actions shall prove the sincerity with which I am now uttering these words."

"Oh, the time may indeed come when I shall require such a friend as you," murmured Octavia, taking the young gentleman's hand and pressing it with all the cordial fervour of an intense gratitude. "Be assured I will not hesitate to address myself to you, Arthur, in such a case. But even now, at once, this moment," she exclaimed, a sudden thought striking her, "I am about to demand a favour at your hands."

"You have only to name it, Octavia," said Arthur, who, perceiving that the beautiful creature was unhappy, experienced a profound compassion and a sincere sympathy in her behalf. "In what manner can I prove my friendship to you, dear cousin?" he inquired, seeing that she hesitated.

"I have confessed to you that I love another," she responded at length, while casting down her looks and blushing deeply; "but I do not wish that my father should learn this secret."

"Not from my lips shall Mr. Clarendon receive the slightest hint of the real motive which has led you to reject my proposal," returned Arthur, emphatically. "I will seek him at once; I will tell him that you and I have had a long and serious conversation together, and that we have mutually arrived at the conclusion that our happiness would not be ensured by any closer alliance than that of friendship."

"I thank you sincerely, my dear cousin," said the young lady, "for this fresh proof of your goodness and generosity toward me."

Arthur Eaton then took his leave of Octavia, and returned to the library, where Mr. Clarendon was building fine castles in the air on the strength of the belief which he entertained that his daughter would cheerfully accept her cousin's proposal.

"Well, my dear Arthur," he exclaimed, the moment the young gentleman reappeared in his presence, "I suppose that nothing remains but to fix the day —"

"Indeed, my dear sir," interrupted Eaton, assuming a serious air, "nought is settled; nor is there aught now to settle."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Clarendon, in amazement.

"I mean that Miss Octavia and myself have had a long and solemn discourse together," answered the Honourable Mr.

Eaton, "and that we have decided upon remaining excellent friends."

"She has refused you, Arthur!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, his lips growing cold and quivering with rage.

"Not so, my dear sir," returned the young gentleman; "or rather, we have refused each other. But, if there be any preponderating fault on one side, it is upon mine, and you must not therefore blame your daughter."

Having thus spoken, Arthur Eaton took his leave of Mr. Clarendon, who was scarcely able to conceal his vexation and disappointment until the door closed behind the young gentleman; and then, throwing himself back in his seat, he clutched the hair on each side of his head, muttering savagely between his teeth, "Miserable wretch that I am! Was I not born to experience an incessant series of misfortunes?"

But suddenly the image of the veiled lady sprang up in his mind; and, recovering his composure, he began to reflect profoundly once more upon all she had that morning said to him.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE HEIR APPARENT AND HIS FRIEND

WHILE these scenes were taking place at Mr. Clarendon's abode in Cavendish Square, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales awoke with a bad headache and in an execrable humour, in his sumptuous bedchamber at Carlton House.

Raising himself painfully in his couch, and giving vent to a bitter imprecation against the aching pangs which racked his head, the prince sought relief in the cooling beverages afforded him by the table at his bedside; and when the draught of hock and soda-water had gone hissing down his parched throat, he threw himself back to enjoy the refreshing sensations which followed.

But though the pain in the head soon underwent a partial mitigation, the train of thoughts which gradually passed through the mind of the heir apparent was of no pleasurable description.

Pauline had discovered his princely rank, and would, of course, communicate the circumstance to her sister. How Octavia would receive the terrible revelation, — whether she would be overwhelmed with grief or goaded to vengeance, — it was impossible to say. But certain it was that the secret of Princess Sophia's frailty was in the keeping of those two young ladies; and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales shuddered when he thought what use they might make of their knowledge of his sister's shame.

Even if he had nothing more than all this to vex him, it was quite enough. But there were other circumstances which forced themselves on his contemplation, in spite of his habitual anxiety to shut his mental eyes against all unpleasant objects.

In the first place, he had not only signally failed in his

stratagem with regard to the Countess of Desborough; but the incidents of the preceding evening had made her acquainted with a secret which so completely put him in her power that he would never again dare to spread the meshes of his intrigues at her feet. For she had learned that Mrs. Fitzherbert was his own wedded wife; and that fact, breathed to the public, would endanger his accession to the throne, inasmuch as the lady whom he had thus espoused, in spite of the Royal Marriage Act, was a Roman Catholic.

Secondly, his Royal Highness had no doubt provoked the bitter indignation of Mrs. Fitzherbert by his conduct toward Lady Desborough; and he not only dreaded "a scene" with his morganatic wife the next time he repaired into her presence, but he likewise trembled lest she should take it into her head to demand a full and complete recognition before the world, in order to escape in future the possibility of receiving such injurious imputations as Eleanor had in the first instance uttered against her during the memorable affair of the preceding evening.

All these matters were terribly perplexing to a prince who hated even the trouble of thinking on anything save pleasure and enjoyment, and who was but little fitted by a life of sensuality and indulgence to grapple with a host of embarrassing circumstances. In fact, he could not bear to think for himself; and, knowing moreover that certain affairs had reached a crisis in which some resolute and definite step must be taken, he resolved to summon his universal friend to counsel and assist him.

Ring the bell by means of the silken cord hanging between the curtains and the wall, he waited impatiently until the French valet, dressed with such nice precision in plain black, responded to the summons.

"Germain," said his Royal Highness, "send up immediately to Mr. Meagles's lodgings with a request that he will come to me as soon as possible."

The valet bowed and retired; and the prince, fancying, with his natural indolence, that half of the necessary remedial measures were already accomplished in the mere fact of sending for the individual to whom their execution was to be entrusted, turned around and fell into a doze.

Then that high and mighty personage, the envied of all men, the adored by all women, the heir apparent to the

throne of England, snored as loudly, as coarsely, and as discordantly as any peasant; and, moreover, this elegant and accomplished individual, this most polished gentleman in Europe, had gone to bed at two in the morning in the most beastly, helpless, and swinish state of intoxication.

O Royalty! how despicable wast thou then!

Well, George Prince of Wales enjoyed a comfortable snooze for nearly an hour, at the expiration of which time Mr. Meagles made his appearance, and his Royal Highness woke up.

"My dear Tim," he said, stretching forth his hand to grasp that of his friend, "come and sit down by the bedside; for I am anxious to have a very serious conversation with you. Indeed, I have sundry revelations to make to you, and divers commissions wherewith to entrust you."

"I am at your service, prince," answered Meagles, taking a chair. Then, lolling back in the seat and caressing his well-curled auburn whiskers, he said, "Between you and me, my illustrious friend, you look just for all the world as if you had been infernally drunk last night. And yet that could scarcely have been the case, seeing that you gave a grand ball."

"By Jove! but it was the case, though, my dear fellow!" exclaimed the prince. "I was what may be called royally drunk; and, what is worse still, I got drunk by myself, through sheer vexation and annoyance."

"The devil you did!" cried Meagles. "Let us hear how that happened."

"Yes, I must touch slightly upon it," said the prince, in a musing tone, "because it has reference to the matters on which I am anxious to consult you. Well, you must know that at the early part of the evening Mrs. Fitzherbert took umbrage at something and left the ballrooms. I sent after her to her own apartments, but she was nowhere to be found. However, it seems that she had retired to a spare bedchamber not very far from the saloons; inasmuch as she suddenly made her appearance from behind the curtains in that chamber, when I and a lady who had been enticed thither by a well-contrived strategem were in the midst of a somewhat heated conversation together."

"What the deuce! did you meet the lady in the very same room to which Mrs. Fitzherbert had previously re-

tired?" asked Meagles, to whom the explanation was not very clear.

"Just so," answered his Royal Highness. "And now, my good friend," continued the heir apparent, with some little degree of hesitation and embarrassment, "I am about to reveal to you precisely the same secret which Mrs. Fitzherbert in her rage proclaimed to the astonished ears of the lady in question. But this secret, my dear Tim," added the prince, emphatically, "is safe with the lady, for she is a woman of honour, and it must be safe with you also."

"Fear nothing, prince," exclaimed Meagles. "You know well enough that I am not likely to betray any confidence which you place in me."

"Oh, I'm perfectly assured of that, Tim!" cried the prince. Then, sinking his voice to a low and solemn whisper, he said, "The secret which Mrs. Fitzherbert proclaimed last night, and which I now reveal to you, is that we are married —"

"Married!" ejaculated Meagles, with well-affected astonishment; for he was already aware of the fact which the Prince of Wales was now confessing to him.

"Hush!" said the heir apparent. "Such a secret ought scarcely to be breathed to the air. Yes, it is true, Tim, that in a moment of weakness, folly, madness, I know not what to call it, I accompanied Mrs. Fitzherbert to the altar. Dazzled by her beauty, burning to possess her, excited almost to a delirium by the winning arts and seductive wiles which she practised to ensnare me, I took that fatal step, believing it to be the only means of obtaining admission to her bed. However, the mischief is done, and cannot be undone; but you can well understand that it has placed me in a cruel dilemma, now that the king and the Ministers have determined to marry me to the German princess."

"And in what manner can I assist you?" demanded Meagles, inwardly delighted to perceive that matters were now coming to a crisis in which his aid must inevitably be sought and full confidence reposed in him accordingly.

"I have been thinking seriously over my position," resumed the prince; "and the only avenue of escape which I can discover out of a complete morass of difficulties is to assent to this marriage with Caroline of Brunswick. Steeped to my very eyes in debts, pestered by creditors whose dunning amounts to intolerable insolence, in constant danger of

having my very carriage and horses seized by a rascally sheriff's-officers, every time I go out, what course am I to adopt? I might bully my father in some respects, but I cannot bully the Ministers; and you know that Pitt and his party hate me as they do the very devil."

"Well, then, from all this I am to understand that your Royal Highness will marry the Princess Caroline of Brunswick?" said Meagles, interrogatively.

"Yes, provided I can in any way induce or compel Mrs. Fitzherbert to consent thereto," replied the prince.

"By fair means I should think that you will never succeed," observed Meagles, dryly.

"That is precisely the apprehension which I entertain," exclaimed the heir apparent. Then, after a brief pause, and in an embarrassed tone, he added, "And as to foul means, I know not what kind to adopt."

"But you would adopt them, if any were to be suggested?" said Meagles, in a quiet way.

"My position is so awkward, so embarrassing, so intolerable, Tim," answered the heir apparent, in a subdued voice and with a significant look, "that I would do anything—yes, anything," he repeated, with marked emphasis, "to ameliorate it. In a word, if Mrs. Fitzherbert will not consent to this marriage which the king and Ministers have chalked out for me, I am a thoroughly lost, ruined, and degraded man."

"You would, therefore, bestow an immense reward upon any one who should, either by fair means or by foul, induce or compel Mrs. Fitzherbert to yield that consent and agree to any rational arrangement which you may be enabled to make with regard to herself? I should observe," added Meagles, "that you would undertake to grant such reward on your accession to the throne?"

"By heaven, I should only be too happy!" exclaimed the prince. "But is it possible, Tim, that you have any plan in your head, any scheme—"

"Well, I can't exactly say at present," interrupted Meagles. "I may, however, think of a project—"

"Ah! I knew you would give me some hope in this respect," cried the prince, chuckling at the idea of getting rid of Mrs. Fitzherbert; for remorse or compunction seldom if ever stayed the progress of this bad man's execrable selfish-

ness. "What is your plan, Tim?" he demanded, impatiently. "What do you suggest?"

"Leave me a little time to consider," responded Meagles, who did not choose to avow at once that he possessed the means of coercing Mrs. Fitzherbert at will. "Have you any other matters to communicate to me? Because you may just as well make a clean breast of all your difficulties and embarrassments while you are about it, and then I may be enabled to judge of the best measures to put you clear, right, and straight again."

"Well, I have something else to communicate," said the prince. "The truth is, I have seduced a young lady —"

"The seduction of a young lady is the heading which must appear to many a chapter in your life, my dear prince," interrupted Meagles. "But go on. You have seduced a young lady, and you are afraid of a row?"

"Precisely so," answered the heir apparent. "The fair one is a certain Miss Clarendon — Octavia Clarendon —"

"Daughter of a gentleman who is in some way connected with Lord Marchmont?" said Meagles, inquiringly.

"The same," replied his Royal Highness. "Do you know him?"

"Only by name," was the response. "But is the affair difficult to manage?"

"You perceive, Tim, that the young lady belongs to a highly respectable family —"

"To an aristocratic family," interrupted Meagles; "and therefore, unless she be very proud of having been seduced by you, and unless her father and relations are also very proud that she should have become a prince's mistress, this affair presents to our view a phase of no ordinary colour. For I am very certain that out of every hundred aristocratic families, ninety-nine would be charmed and delighted to see a wife, a sister, or a daughter publicly pointed out as the mistress of your Royal Highness."

"Such is no doubt the fact," observed George; "for the aristocracy, so haughty and overbearing to the middle and lower classes, is nauseatingly servile and cringing to royalty. However, we will not waste time in discussing this point. Suffice it for our present purpose that Mr. Clarendon is a man who must be appeased for the dishonour of his daughter."

"Is he acquainted with the little circumstance?" inquired Tim.

"Not yet — at least I hope not. But there is no time to lose, my dear friend."

"What do you wish to have done?" demanded Meagles.

"A peerage must be obtained for Mr. Clarendon," was the emphatic response.

"The devil!" ejaculated Tim. "Peerages are not picked up in the street; and I don't think that you could very well humble yourself so far to Pitt as to ask him for one."

"No, I would see the Prime Minister dead and damned first," answered the prince. "It is of my father that the peerage must be demanded; and it is you who will undertake the mission on my behalf."

"Would you have me go to Windsor to wait upon his Majesty on such a business?" demanded Meagles, surveying the prince with the most unfeigned astonishment.

"To be sure I would!" ejaculated his Royal Highness. "Surely you have the courage, Tim?"

"I have the courage to face the very devil himself," responded Meagles; "and that is more than enough to enable me to look the king in the countenance. But are you serious?"

"Never more so. You know that half of the Lightfoot certificate which I have in my possession?"

"To be sure I do," said Meagles, throwing off with an effort a sensation of uneasiness which suddenly began to creep over him at the mention of that fragment of the document; for the reader will remember that for some weeks past it had been in the possession of Tim himself, who found it amongst the roll of papers which he purloined from the desk on that morning when the heir apparent amused himself with the Amazon in the bath.

"Well, Tim," continued the Prince of Wales, "you must take that fragment of the certificate with you, and my illustrious father will be very glad to give you in exchange an undertaking that the necessary patents shall be drawn up without delay, in order to confer the peerage on Mr. Clarendon. Come, Tim, you shall be off to Windsor this very day, for we may as well set briskly and earnestly to work with a view to have these little matters settled as soon as possible. Give me my desk, Tim, and I will at once put you in possession

of the half of the certificate which is to act like a spell upon my father."

Putting a good face upon the matter, and with as much alacrity as if he knew that the document now required was really in the place where the prince had deposited it, Tim Meagles proceeded to convey the handsome writing-desk from the chiffonier on which it stood to the table by the side of the sumptuous couch. His Royal Highness then drew the long gold chain from beneath his pillow; and with the key suspended thereto he opened the desk.

Plunging his hand amidst the papers which filled one of the compartments, the heir apparent sought for the particular packet which he required; and when he could not immediately find it, he instituted a more careful and less hurried examination into the contents of that division of his desk. But, the packet still continuing invisible, he rapped out sundry impatient oaths, while a cloud gathered rapidly upon his brow.

"By heaven! I have lost the papers, the very important papers which I am seeking," he observed, in a tone of bitter vexation. "I am sure that I put them away here."

"You might have locked them up in some other place," suggested Meagles, as if quite innocent of any sinister knowledge concerning them.

"No; I am sure they were here!" exclaimed the prince. "Perdition! some one has been to my desk," he added, his entire countenance contracting with the rage and alarm that gathered rapidly in his breast.

"Have you lost any papers besides the half of the certificate?" demanded Meagles.

"Yes, several," responded the heir apparent, clenching his fists with impotent fury; "papers of the utmost consequence, proving this very marriage between myself and Mrs. Fitzherbert."

"That is awkward, very awkward," observed Meagles, shaking his head in a serious manner.

"Awkward! 'tis positively ruinous," exclaimed the prince. "What shall I do? Whom can I suspect? The only person at all likely to visit my desk would be Mrs. Fitzherbert herself —"

"Depend upon it, she is the authoress of this circumstance," interrupted Tim; "and if I were you, I would not

annoy myself with unpleasant speculations and conjectures. Besides, if any other person should have got hold of those papers, it can only be for the purpose of selling them back again to you."

"True!" ejaculated the prince. "But what are we to do now without the fragment of the certificate in Hannah Lightfoot's affair?"

"Have the goodness to listen to me for a few minutes, prince," said Meagles; "and I dare swear we shall come to a right understanding. You know that I am a man of rather ready wit, and that I don't take a year to decide what ought to be done when the emergency is so pressing as scarcely to leave a minute for reflection. Well, I have hit upon two schemes —"

"Two schemes?" exclaimed the prince, inquiringly.

"Yes, two schemes," repeated Meagles; "for are there not two separate affairs to settle? One is to induce Mrs. Fitzherbert to consent to separate from you, to renounce all pretensions to be considered your wife, and to agree to such terms for her future maintenance as you may be enabled to propose. This, I say, is one object to gain, and I am the man to accomplish it."

"You?" cried the prince, with mingled amazement and pleasure. "But Mrs. Fitzherbert does not —"

And he stopped short suddenly.

"Does not like me much better than the devil does holy water, eh?" exclaimed Meagles. "That is what your Royal Highness would have said, and why not finish your sentence? It is useless to stand on ceremony with me. However, I tell you over again that I will undertake to induce the lady, whether she likes me or not, to assent to all the conditions I have named; but I must stipulate that you do not ask me to explain the means which I shall adopt for this purpose."

"Damn the means, Tim," exclaimed the prince, in a hilarious tone, "provided the aim be accomplished. You have my free permission," continued this execrably selfish and diabolically heartless individual, "to use any spells, charms, incantations, or enchantments you choose, — in plain terms, to adopt any means you may think advisable, so long as the grand result be gained."

"Good!" observed Meagles, scarcely able, however, to conceal his disgust at the cowardly, unmanly, demoniac treachery

which that infamous prince was capable of practising toward a woman who really loved him. "You may consider the affair relative to Mrs. Fitzherbert as being just the same as if it were settled. On my return from Windsor I will direct my immediate attention thereto."

"Your return from Windsor!" repeated the prince; "but how can you go thither at all without the document?"

"I have a scheme in my head to meet that emergency also," replied Meagles. "Come, don't ask me any questions, and don't make yourself unhappy. Both matters shall be settled, I can promise you. Mrs. Fitzherbert shall agree to terms, on the one hand, and your illustrious father shall grant Mr. Clarendon a peerage, on the other hand."

"Is it possible, Tim?" exclaimed the delighted heir apparent. "You are the cleverest fellow in the universe, by God! But how can I reward you for all this?"

"When I have fulfilled what I have promised, it will be time to talk of recompense," said Meagles. "No cure, no pay; but if there be a cure in this instance, I warn you, my dear prince, that I shall ask something handsome as my reward, to be granted whenever the means are in your power."

"You cannot ask too much, my dear friend," said his Royal Highness, who was always ready to promise most lavishly at the very moment he was least able to perform.

"Well, well," said Meagles, in a tone of apparent indifference, "we will talk about that another time. I am now off to Windsor."

Thus speaking, he shook hands with the prince, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XXX

THE EXPEDITION

WE must now inform our readers that when the message which his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales sent up to Jermyn Street, requesting the immediate attendance of Mr. Meagles at Carlton House, was delivered to that gentleman, he was sitting at a late breakfast in company with his bosom friend, the Amazon.

This beautiful, eccentric, and profligate woman was clad in her male garb, as usual; and the early scamper which she had taken on horseback left upon her cheeks so ruddy a glow and so rich a bloom of health as to give her the appearance of all the virgin freshness of that youthfulness the plump charms and firms contours of which she had so well preserved.

At the moment when the message from the Prince of Wales was delivered in Jermyn Street, Tim Meagles and his lovely companion were enjoying a hearty laugh in anticipation of some capital fun which they had promised themselves that noon; for the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby had presented them with platform tickets for a grand meeting of the New Light Tract Distribution Society, which was to be holden at midday precise in a large hall somewhere in the Strand.

But the message from the prince suddenly appeared to put an end to this project, until Meagles suggested that Lady Lade should divert herself by repairing to the meeting, where he might join her the moment he had ascertained what his Royal Highness wanted with him.

This arrangement being accordingly settled, Meagles ordered his gig, drove the Amazon to the place of assembly, escorted her to a seat upon the platform, and then, taking a temporary leave of her hastened to Carlton House, where he

had that interview with the prince which has been recorded in the preceding chapter.

Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby rose to deliver an oration in acknowledgment of honours which had been done him.

But scarcely had the first nasal twang of his elocutionary style begun to vibrate through the air, when the Amazon felt a hand suddenly placed upon her shoulder.

She started, looked up, and beheld Tim Meagles behind her.

"Come, my beauty," he whispered, bending down his head toward her ear, "you must follow me away from this humbugging scene at once. There is better sport for us in view."

The beautiful huntress accordingly rose from her seat and accompanied Tim Meagles from the hall.

On reaching the street, he handed her into his gig; then, taking his own seat in the vehicle, he drove at a rapid rate toward Jermyn Street.

During the drive to his lodgings, Tim Meagles explained in a few hasty words that he was compelled to repair forthwith to Windsor Castle, upon very pressing business in behalf of the Prince of Wales, and he invited the Amazon to accompany him.

"The truth is, my beauty," he said, with a merry laugh, "I am going to pay my respects to his Majesty King George the Third; and as you and I are now rowing in the same boat with regard to certain little plans and intrigues of our own, I think it will be as well for you to go with me."

"Are you in earnest, Tim?" demanded the Amazon, with a smile which displayed her brilliant teeth between the moist red lips.

"Never more so in my life, Letitia," responded Meagles. "The moment we get to Jermyn Street, you will send for your horse, and you can also forward at the same time a note to Sir John, telling him that you will not be at home until to-morrow afternoon or evening. You can do this, can't you?"

"Most assuredly," answered the huntress. "But is it your intention that I should merely accompany you to Windsor —"

"Not only to Windsor, my charmer," interrupted Meagles, "but likewise into the very presence of George the Third himself."

"Then I must take a change of garments with me," observed Lady Lade; "and in order to select an appropriate attire, it is absolutely necessary that I should go home first."

"No such thing!" exclaimed Meagles. "We will have some fun with the old king, depend upon it, and therefore you shall appear before him in your Amazonian garb. The instant he knows what our business is, he will be civil enough, I can promise you. But here we are."

And as Meagles thus spoke, the gig stopped at Mrs. Piggleberry's house in Jermyn Street.

The instant that Tim and his fair companion got up-stairs, the requisite orders were issued for their journey; and a hasty note, which the Amazon penned to her husband, was despatched by Wasp to the baronet's house in King Street, the page likewise receiving instructions to bring around her ladyship's favourite steed.

It was about half-past two o'clock when the preparations for departure were accomplished; and now behold Tim Meagles mounted on a spirited horse, which, however, knew its master's hand by the way in which he held the reins, the Amazon bestriding a beautiful animal, whose curvetings at starting enabled her to display her unequalled skill in the equestrian art, and Master Wasp seated on the prettiest pony that ever attracted notice with its exquisite shape and its graceful action.

Such was the cavalcade which now moved away from Jermyn Street, and proceeded gently over the stones until the good hard road was gained; and then the steeds broke into a smart trot.

Nothing could exceed the picturesque elegance of Lady Letitia's appearance as she sat, like a modern Diana the Huntress, upon that beautiful animal, which she managed with such skill and which seemed proud to bear so lovely and interesting a burden.

The fine, sharp, frosty air brought the richest carnation hues to the Amazon's cheeks; her eyes, those superb dark eyes, shone with the excitement of a kindred glow; her luxuriant hair, glossy and silken, streamed in a myriad ringlets from

beneath the broad-brimmed hat which she wore so jauntily and which gave a certain archness of expression to her handsome features.

And how faultless was her carriage, how full of winning grace and statuesque elegance was her attitude on horseback! The harmony of all the undulating lines which traced the fine contours, the rounded limbs, and the voluptuous reliefs of her symmetrical form, the suppleness of which her organs were capable, the lightness of her movements, and the flexibility which distinguished her muscular powers, and the superb swell of the bosom that seemed ready to burst through the tightly fitting coat which served as an external indication of the luxuriance and firmness of that bust, — all these were set off to their utmost advantage by the feminine gracefulness mingled with the masculine skill and boldness which characterized her appearance as an equestrian.

Ten thousand times more attractive was she in her male attire than when dressed in the garb which properly belonged to her sex. For whereas the latter concealed all that fine sweeping length of limb which the Amazon possessed in such perfection, so, on the other hand, did the tight breeches and the elegant boots develop and set off, rather than conceal, those robust but symmetrical proportions which we have just eulogized. In the same way did the close fitting frock exhibit the great expansion of the hips, the waist that seemed so wasplike in its slenderness when compared with the fulness of the contiguous parts, and that exuberant bust which a very critical judgment would have pronounced too large to satisfy a pure and delicate taste for beauty.

But a splendid creature was she, certainly, and well might Tim Meagles be proud of the companionship of that goddess-like horsewoman.

Her fine large dark eyes sparkled with vivacity and spirit; the smiles that wreathed her rich red lips were full of cheerfulness; and the glowing colour, which was heightened by exertion, resembled the brightest bloom of the carnation, dying off into ivory fairness.

To gaze upon her for a few moments was sufficient to convince the beholder that to a gay and joyous nature she united a warm and voluptuous temperament, and that boldly and fearlessly as she could dash along over gate

and fence, and barrier and ditch, in the ardour of the chase, so meltingly and tenderly could she dissolve into amorous softness and yield herself up to the delicious abandonment of wanton dalliance.

Having trotted, then cantered, and then galloped along the road for some distance, the party reined in their steeds to a walk; and Meagles now related in full all the particulars of his interview with the Prince of Wales.

"Well," exclaimed the Amazon, laughing heartily, "this is about as amusing an adventure as I was ever led into, or as you and I were ever bent upon together. Here we are, you in your riding-dress, and I in my huntress garb, on our way to Windsor Castle, to demand an audience of the king; and the object of that audience is the modest request of a peerage for some gentleman whose name is probably unknown to his Majesty's ears."

"I admit that the adventure is singular and the object is somewhat bold," said Meagles, echoing his fair companion's merry laugh; "but, depend upon it, my beauty, that we will succeed. I have got the document, the precious document, in my pocket," he added, his tone suddenly becoming more serious; "and if his Majesty be proof against that, why, then I shall be most wonderfully mistaken."

"But for what reason on earth have you resolved to drag me into the royal presence?" inquired Lady Letitia.

"In the first place, my charmer," answered Tim, "because you and I are partners in certain schemes and plans —"

"But do you fancy, my dear fellow," interrupted the huntress, reproachfully, "that I cannot trust you to manage things by yourself? I would not wrong you to such an extent, Tim," she added, hastily; "for you know that I entertain an affection for you, and I believe that I am not altogether indifferent to you."

"You may well say that, Letitia," ejaculated Meagles, although at the same instant the image of Rose Foster sprang up in his mind and caused him to heave a sigh. "But, as I was observing," he hurriedly continued, "I thought it right, in the first place, that you should come with me; and secondly, I wanted a cheerful companion. If you object to my first motive, you will at least give me credit for the latter."

"Ah! you are a good-for-nothing fellow, Tim," exclaimed the huntress, slashing him across the shoulders in a playful

manner with her riding-whip. "And so I suppose we shall pass the night at Windsor, eh?" she observed, glancing archly toward him.

"As a matter of course, because we cannot hope to see his Majesty before to-morrow morning, although we will endeavour to obtain an interview this evening," said Meagles. "But remember, my beauty, you will pass as Mrs. Meagles at the hotel at Windsor, and now you comprehend what that means."

"We shall see all about it presently, Tim," responded Lady Letitia, laughing. "I suppose that Wasp will tell no tales on our return to London."

"If Wasp were inclined to gossiping, he might have told enough concerning us long ago," said Meagles. "But neither he nor the excellent Mrs. Pigglesberry ever seem to take the slightest notice when you pass the night with me at my lodgings."

"Hold your tongue, Tim!" exclaimed the Amazon. "It is positively shocking to talk in such a way in the broad daylight," she added, her merry laugh again ringing musically through the crisp sharp air. "And now tell me, Mr. Scapegrace, why you have undertaken that crusade against poor Mrs. Fitzherbert, whom the unprincipled George is thus resolved to persecute?"

"Mrs. Fitzherbert has always hated me as sincerely as the devil does holy water," answered Meagles; "and at times she has been most repulsively rude and insufferably insolent toward me. Now, you know, my charmer, that I have never merited such treatment at her hands; for I have frequently rendered her little services which she ought not to forget. More than once have I taken her jewelry to the pawnbroker's for her when she was short of cash and the prince had none to give her; and I have even given my own security and lent my own money to silence her most clamorous creditors. But I do not recollect that I have ever received from her lips a single word of thanks. She has treated me as if I were a lackey, a lickspittle, a slave, a servile wretch who was only fitted to be employed in the vilest offices, and who was too well rewarded by the mere fact of being allowed to perform such services for royalty. Now, my dear Letitia, could I do otherwise than smart under such behaviour as this?"

"I admit that the provocation is great, Tim," said the Amazon; "but you are too good-hearted a fellow to cherish vindictive feelings, especially against a poor weak woman who will shortly find her own husband — for such indeed the prince is — becoming her greatest enemy."

"Were it a mere question of vengeance, my darling huntress," responded Meagles, "I should scorn, despise the idea. Vengeance against a woman is beneath a man. But the conduct which I propose to pursue in respect to Mrs. Fitzherbert essentially regards the particular schemes that you and I have formed. Therefore, as it suits my interests — or rather, our interest — to league with the prince against that lady, you can well comprehend that her conduct has not been such as to excite any compunction or remorse in my breast so as to induce me to hesitate ere I undertake this crusade against her."

"But I do not yet comprehend how it will serve our views to adopt such a course," said the Amazon.

"In a very few words I can explain myself," answered Meagles. "We wish to obtain as complete a hold upon the prince as possible, do we not? Well, let him break with Mrs. Fitzherbert, let him marry the Princess of Brunswick, and he is ten thousand times more effectually in our power than at the present moment. For we possess the proofs of his union with Mrs. Fitzherbert, a Catholic —"

"I understand, Tim," interrupted Lady Lade; "an exposure of this marriage would prove ruinous to George, whether as Prince of Wales or King of England, and, as you justly observed, he becomes more completely enmeshed in our snares than ever."

"Then you approve of the course which I have undertaken to adopt?" said Meagles, inquiringly.

"Yes, now that I consider it in all its bearings," replied the Amazon. "Well," she added, with another merry laugh, "I do really believe that you will die a duke in the end, Tim. But remember," she exclaimed, her mirth subsiding into an arch smile, "remember that I am also to be a duchess."

"I have not forgotten our bargain, my love," exclaimed Meagles.

Thus speaking, he put spurs to his steed; and the party broke into a sharp trot.

It was about a quarter to five when they entered the town of Windsor; and, proceeding direct to the White Hart hotel, they put up their horses at the stables belonging to that establishment. Meagles then made inquiries of the landlord as to the probability of obtaining an audience of his Majesty that evening; but by the answers he received, he was speedily convinced that he must postpone all hope of seeing the king until the following morning. He accordingly signified his intention of passing the night at the hotel, and the landlord forthwith led the way to a handsome suite of apartments.

Being thus installed at the White Hart, in company with the Amazon, Meagles ordered an excellent dinner; while Wasp, who had received a hint to speak of the huntress as his master's wife, was suitably provided for in the kitchen.

By means of an excellent bottle of claret and a pleasant conversation, Tim Meagles and Lady Lade whiled away the time until eleven o'clock, when they retired to rest.

At half-past nine on the following morning they were seated at breakfast; and when the meal was concluded, they sallied forth from the White Hart and proceeded in the direction of the castle.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE INTERVIEW

WE must now request our readers to accompany us into a small but elegantly furnished apartment in Windsor Castle.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; and, standing on the rug, with one arm leaning on the mantel, King George the Third was dictating a letter to a young lady of great beauty who was seated at a superb writing-table.

His Majesty was at this time fifty-seven years old. Naturally of a robust and vigorous constitution, he seemed well adapted to maintain a successful struggle against the influence of advancing age; but care had accomplished what time could not do, and had bowed the form and traced wrinkles upon the countenance of that monarch.

For, oh, deep was the sorrow which his heart cherished, and bitter was the remorse which wrung his soul with anguish; and there were moments, and hours, and days in that king's life when he envied the lot of the poorest of his subjects, and when they would not have envied him had all been known.

It has hitherto been the custom and the fashion to speak of George the Third in terms of praise. Historians, for the most part, denominate him a good king, and monarchy-worshipping panegyrists have endowed him with every possible virtue. He has been called the Father of his People, the Paternal Sovereign, and a pattern of virtue and morality. The world has been gravely told that England never was so happy, prosperous, and free as under his rule; and it seems so natural to speak of "the good old times" of George the Third that thousands of our readers will doubtless be astonished and startled when we assure them that a more infamous miscreant never disgraced a throne than that man.

A superstitious bigot in religious matters, entertaining the most implicit belief in the divine right of kings, looking upon the people as having been made for him, and not himself for the people, of such a diabolically cruel disposition that he never would exercise the prerogative of mercy, but gloated over the idea of miserable wretches being strung up in dozens and half-dozens at a time, so heartlessly tyrannical that he waged a sanguinary war against the brave Americans when they so gloriously threw off his infernal yoke, so wedded to despotic notions that he expended hundreds of millions of treasure and poured forth British blood in torrents in order to combat the French Revolution and its effects, and of such a base, mean, cowardly, and despicable character that he not only persecuted men with unrelenting bitterness for their political and religious opinions, but also employed spies, agents, and informers to get up public meetings and disturbances, in order that the people might be mown down by artillery and cut to pieces by charging cavalry, — such was George the Third.

But who was the beautiful young woman that was writing at the table on the occasion of which we are now especially speaking?

She was the king's favourite daughter, the Princess Amelia.

In personal appearance and in disposition there was a great similitude between this princess and her sister Sophia, whom we have already introduced to our readers.

The beauty of Amelia was, however, of a more voluptuous cast than that of Sophia.

Her complexion was dazzlingly fair, enriched upon the cheeks with the sweetest and most delicate vermeil bloom. When her mind was perfectly tranquil and her pulses were not quickened by the excitement of thoughts or passions or emotions, then did the soft lustre of her large blue eyes shed the calmest expression over her entire countenance, giving an air of pensive repose to her features. When gently moved by pleasurable feelings, the glances of those azure orbs and the soft smile that played around her mouth denoted the union of a warm heart with a kind and generous nature; but when more profoundly excited, the looks and the manners of the princess evinced all the vivid and varying sensibilities of an impassioned woman. Then, too, her eyes would swim

in a voluptuous languor, the flush of sensuality would appear upon her countenance, and the heightening scarlet of the full, pouting, and almost coarse lips would indicate strong desires and a licentious imagination.

Her figure was more full and of richer contours than even that of her sister Sophia. Her sloping shoulders were softly rounded, giving her the faintest, slightest semblance of stooping; and yet they borrowed the appearance of breadth from the well-expanded chest, whence the bosoms rose grandly. The whole form of the Princess Amelia was characterized by embonpoint, and was soft, full, and voluptuous in the extreme, leaving the waist, however, sufficiently symmetrical, though by no means sylphlike. Indeed, her Royal Highness was a perfect Hebe in the style of her beauty and the luscious ripeness of her charms; and alike in person and in temperament did she appear to have been formed by nature for the enjoyment of wanton pleasures.

Over those shoulders so dazzlingly white, — not snowy nor like alabaster, but of the inimitable whiteness of living flesh which is fair and soft to the eye, — over those shoulders, we say, flowed a profusion of silky hair, not so colourless as flaxen nor so deep as auburn, but of the bright and glossy golden hue which exists between.

Such was the Princess Amelia; and although her form, expanded into the luxuriance of womanhood, gave her the appearance of at least three or four and twenty years of age, yet in reality was she only eighteen.

It was about a quarter past ten o'clock in the morning when we thus introduce our readers to the king and his favourite daughter.

The former was dictating, and the latter was writing, a letter to the Princess Caroline of Brunswick, who had already been fixed upon as the future spouse of the Prince of Wales; for whenever a member of the English royal family requires a husband or a wife, as the case may be, recourse is invariably had to the tribe of beggarly German pauper princes and princesses, and thence has it arisen that England is either infested with these greedy and disgusting foreign leeches, whose ravenous maws are never satiated with drinking the heart's blood of the toiling, starving, oppressed, and trampled-on industrious classes, or else our treasury is compelled to grant revenues to those petty potentates who would

not even be blessed with a thatch to their houses if it were not for British gold.

But John Bull is the greatest fool in all Christendom; for, not contented with ministering to the rapacity of those titled robbers denominated the aristocracy, he must need permit the paltriest German rascals and demireps that ever bore jaw-breaking names to plunder him in the most flagrant manner, just because they are grand dukes or dukes, and grand duchesses or duchesses.

Let us, however, continue our narrative before we lash ourselves into a fury at these iniquities.

The Princess Amelia had just closed, sealed, and addressed her letter, when a page entered to inform his Majesty that a lady and gentleman humbly besought an audience on behalf of certain matters connected with his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

At the mention of his eldest son's name, a cloud spread rapidly over the countenance of the king; but, checking the ejaculation of displeasure which had risen to the very tip of his tongue, he demanded whether the lady and gentleman who sought an interview had given their names.

The page handed his Majesty a card, whereon appeared the name of Mr. Meagles.

"I've heard of him, I've heard of him!" ejaculated the monarch, flinging the card petulantly upon the writing-table, and speaking with more than his usual volubility. "Pitt, who knows everything — everything, says he's a sad dog — sad dog. And he's very intimate with George, too — very intimate: a drinking companion, I'll be bound — I'll be bound. I will not see him at all," added the king, turning abruptly toward the page and speaking as savagely as if it were the page himself who was giving offence or annoyance.

The youth bowed and was retreating toward the door, when the Princess Amelia, who had taken up the card and looked at it, made a rapid sign for him to remain. Then, rising from her seat, and approaching her father, she said, "You know, sire, that this gentleman — Mr. Meagles, I believe," she added, glancing at the card to assure herself that she had pronounced the name correctly, "is a very intimate friend of my brother; and it can be no ordinary matter which has led Mr. Meagles to solicit a private audience of your Majesty."

"Do you think so, 'Melia? — do you think so?" exclaimed the king, who had a nervous habit of reiterating the half-broken and jerking kind of sentences of which his conversation was composed.

"I do indeed think, my dear father, that you ought to see this Mr. Meagles," said the princess, in a firm tone but with a sweetly coaxing and irresistibly winning manner.

"Well, well, I will see him. Meagles, eh? — Meagles — Meagles," exclaimed his Majesty, as if practising his tongue to pronounce the name correctly. "Queer appellation, that — very queer! Meagles — Meagles — Meagles," continued the monarch, in a musing style.

"The page is waiting your Majesty's commands," said the princess.

"Oh, commands, eh? Meagles, eh?" cried the king, still harping with a species of childishness or imbecility upon the name. "Meagles — Meagles! Well, let Mr. Meagles be introduced into our presence, and Mrs. Meagles, too; for I suppose it must be Mrs. Meagles who is with him. Meagles — Meagles!"

And his Majesty kept on repeating the name for at least a dozen times, but in a sinking tone, so that at last the iteration ended in an inaudible whisper.

The page, understanding that he was to bring the visitors into the royal presence, bowed and withdrew; and the Princess Amelia likewise retired.

King George the Third then began to pace the room in a nervous manner and with uneven steps, renewing his muttered iterations of the name of Meagles.

At length the door was thrown open, and the page announced "Mr. and Mrs. Meagles" in a loud voice.

Another moment, and Tim and the Amazon stood in the presence of the king.

Now George the Third was a great stickler for court etiquette; and when his eyes encountered the gentleman in a riding-dress and the lady in her male attire, each too with whip in hand, a frown of displeasure gathered rapidly upon that countenance which was usually so stolid, vacant, and inane in its expression.

Meagles instantaneously saw that the king was displeased, and the huntress also observed that sinister cloud spreading upon the royal features, and the truth struck them both

at the same instant. But for this little incident they were not altogether unprepared; and Meagles hastened to offer those excuses which he deemed suitable.

"Your Majesty is surprised, and doubtless offended," he said, in a very respectful tone, "that Mrs. Meagles should have ventured to appear in such an attire before your Majesty, or that I should have been bold enough to come hither otherwise than in the costume befitting a court. But we are plain, honest, every-day kind of people; and we hope your Majesty will give us credit for acting on the impulses of a moment when the object is to serve a friend. In plain terms, the business which has brought us to Windsor Castle is of so pressing a nature that we really had not time to make any change in our costume."

"And your name is Meagles — Meagles — eh?" gasped the king, eying him with great suspicion.

"Such is my name, at your Majesty's service," was the reply. "Your Majesty's son, the Prince of Wales, usually calls me 'Tim,' and sometimes 'My dear Tim.' As for my creditors, they call me 'honest Mr. Meagles.'"

"Well, well," exclaimed his Majesty, not knowing exactly what to make of the gentleman, and uncertain whether to give him credit for matchless impudence or genuine John Bull bluntness; "we shall know more of you presently, I dare say — I dare say. And this is Mrs. Meagles, eh?"

"That is Mrs. Meagles, may it please your Majesty," answered Tim.

"Fine woman, monstrous fine woman," muttered the king to himself, as he surveyed the Amazon from head to foot; and, while his eyes were thus wandering leisurely and scrutinizingly over her splendid form, as she stood in a graceful attitude of dignified self-possession before him, a glimmering of satisfaction appeared upon his countenance. "Ah! fine woman, Mrs. Meagles," he repeated, in a louder tone; "very fine woman, Mrs. Meagles, monstrous fine woman! Dress not so unbecoming, after all, not near so unbecoming; rather suitable, on the contrary, rather suitable."

And then, turning slowly away, he seated himself in an armchair near the writing-table.

"You've quite charmed his wicked old eye, my beauty," said Meagles, in a low tone, to the Amazon.

"Eh! what, what?" ejaculated the king, starting up again. "What's that you said, Mr. Meagles, what's that? Something about an eye?"

"I ventured to observe, Sire," was the cool but respectful response, "that I flattered myself that my wife had found favour in your Majesty's royal eye."

"Oh! ah! Well, there's no harm in saying that, no harm at all, Mr. Meagles," exclaimed King George the Third, quietly resuming his seat. "Come, now, what is the motive of your presence here? Why have you besought an audience of your sovereign? From the observations you have already made, Meagles, I do not suppose that the prince has wronged this lady — your wife, I mean — Mrs. Meagles?"

"Very far from it, may it please your Majesty," answered Tim. "The truth is, my wife is so deeply imbued with a sense of his Royal Highness's invariable kindness, condescension, and goodness toward me, that she insisted upon accompanying me to Windsor Castle, in the hope that her prayers and entreaties, when united with my own, would have additional weight in the consideration of your Majesty."

"Prayers! Entreaties! How now?" ejaculated the king. "What is the matter? Speak out, Meagles, or do you speak for your husband, madam?"

"May it please your Majesty," said the Amazon, advancing a little closer toward the king, and then standing with a most graceful and elegant attitude in his presence, "it is on behalf of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales that my husband and myself have ventured to appear before our sovereign, fully convinced that our good and gracious king will, at all events, accord us a patient hearing, the more so inasmuch as it is no favour that we seek on our own account."

"Prettily expressed, musical voice, good teeth," muttered the king to himself. Then, in a louder tone, he said, "Go on, Mrs. Meagles; I am listening with attention, Mrs. Meagles. Go on."

"Profoundly does it afflict me, may it please your Majesty," she resumed, "that —"

"No, no: it doesn't please me that you should be afflicted, Mrs. Meagles," exclaimed George III, interrupting her in almost a playful manner. "But go on, go on, Mrs. Meagles. I'm all attention again, all attention."

"I was about to inform your Majesty," continued the

Amazon, "that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has had the misfortune to seduce a young lady of good family —"

"Had the misfortune!" ejaculated the king, springing to his feet. "The misfortune, do you call it, Mrs. Meagles? Misfortune, indeed — misfortune! And pray is there no misfortune on the other side? Has the young lady nothing to complain of, Mrs. Meagles? Come, answer me. Misfortune, indeed!"

And his Majesty sank back again into the armchair.

"I meant to observe, may it please you, Sire," continued the huntress, after darting a sly glance at Tim Meagles, who enjoyed the whole scene uncommonly, "I meant to observe that it was a great misfortune for both parties, — for the young lady, because she belongs to a family connected with the peerage, and for his Royal Highness, because he must take some immediate step to hush the matter up."

"And for this purpose he has sent you both to me," exclaimed the king, once more leaping from his seat, and now flying into a passion. "Upon my word, a pretty misfortune, truly. Seductions right and left come to my knowledge, and the hero, — always George Prince of Wales! Pretty misfortune, indeed! 'Young lady connected with the peerage!' Who is she, madam?" he demanded, turning abruptly around upon the Amazon, as if he were about to snap her head off.

"Her name is Octavia Clarendon, may it please your Majesty," was the response. "Her father is distantly related to the Lord Marchmont."

"Ah! the Lord Marchmont, good Tory, staunch supporter, pillar of the throne!" ejaculated the king. Then, growing considerably calmer, he shook his head, saying, "This affair must indeed be looked into. Won't do to offend a man like Lord Marchmont; always votes in favour of Ministerial measures. Lord Marchmont, good Tory, would vote black's white, or white's black, to please me. Ah! he is a true aristocrat, a staunch noble, Lord Marchmont! Well, Mrs. Meagles, I suppose that as yet this misfortune has been hushed up?"

"Such is the case, may it please your Majesty," answered Lady Lade.

"And what do you propose? What do you suggest?"

What do you require me to do?" demanded the king, resuming his seat.

"To confer the honour of a peerage, with an accompanying pension, upon Mr. Clarendon, the father of this young lady whom the prince has seduced," was the response.

"Never!" ejaculated George III, his puffy cheeks becoming purple with rage; and, bounding from his chair, he stood for a few moments gazing ferociously upon the Amazon, but unable to utter another word. "No, never!" he at length exclaimed. "I am not to be persuaded into such a course as this. What! dishonour the peerage by selling it, as it were, for a girl's beauty! Upon my word, Mrs. Beagles—no, Meagles—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Meagles, I am surprised that you and your husband should have had the audacity to seek my presence for such a purpose. Our interview is at an end, the audience is closed."

And the king, turning abruptly away, was advancing toward the door of an inner room, when Tim Meagles exclaimed, "One word, may it please your Majesty!"

"One word!" repeated the king, stopping short. "What for, sir? What more can you or your wife have to say to me? One word, indeed, one word!"

"Yes, one word," exclaimed Meagles, emphatically; "for your Majesty does not appear to be fully aware of the seriousness, the extreme seriousness—"

"The seriousness of what, sir?" demanded the king, now turning completely around, and retracing his steps toward his importunate visitors. "The seriousness of what, sir, of what?" he reiterated, nervously, and greatly agitated.

"Of his Royal Highness's position," answered Meagles, in a firm and resolute manner.

"It is not I who have placed him in it," exclaimed his Majesty. "He has done it all himself—all himself. You may retire, Mr. Meagles—Meagles—you may retire. Any further colloquy on the subject will be useless, quite useless."

"Nay, then I am afraid your Majesty will drive his Royal Highness to extremes," said Tim; "and the unpleasant consequences of this affair will not be experienced by him alone."

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired the king, struck by the mingled singularity and audacity of an observation the covert menace of which was unmistakable. "What do you

mean? Speak, sir! What do you mean?" he repeated, petulantly.

"I mean, Sire," responded Tim Meagles, looking the monarch full in the face, "that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will not fall alone. If he sink beneath the weight of infamy and shame, he will drag down others with him, — yes, even though it be his own father. And that is God's truth!"

George III sank upon a chair, gasping.

Was it possible that he had heard aright, or had his ears deceived him? He closed his eyes for a few moments, the more easily to commune with himself by shutting out all exterior objects from his view; and this brief but painful interval of reflection convinced him that it was no delusion, that his ears had not misled him, and that a threat, darkly intelligible, had been uttered by the daring man who still stood in his presence.

Then all the vindictive blood of the Guelphs rushed to his countenance, tingeing even the whites of his eyes, and making the orbs themselves seem ready to start out of his head; and, springing from his chair, he threw a furious look upon Meagles, exclaiming, "I understand you, sir, I understand you! My son has made you the instrument and agent of his own vile undutifulness; and you are base enough to lend yourself to his parricide intentions. But you may return to him, sir, you may return to him, and tell him that I defy his menaces. Yes, I, his father, I, the king, scorn and laugh at this silly, wretched attempt — to — to —"

"Your Majesty should know that hard words do not break bones," interrupted Tim Meagles, in a tone and manner so full of easy defiance that the king was perfectly staggered. "Your Majesty has thought fit to couple my name in an injurious fashion with that of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales; but I am tough enough to bear all your Majesty has just said, and a great deal more."

"This to me, sir!" ejaculated George III, now literally foaming with rage. "Begone!" and he extended his hand toward the bell.

"One word! only one word more!" cried Meagles. "Does your Majesty really wish that a certain certificate should be published to the world?"

"I care not!" exclaimed the king, still holding the bell-pull. "As my scapegrace son's boon companion, you are, of

course, in the secret respecting that fragment of a document — ”

“ Fragment! ” repeated Meagles; “ fragment, did your Majesty say? I beg your pardon, sir, but the whole paper is in our possession — in my possession.”

“ It’s false, sir, it’s false! ” ejaculated George III. “ My son has often told me that before, but he never could produce more than one-half — ”

“ Your Majesty may now, therefore, have an opportunity of seeing the whole,” said Meagles, in a tone of calm confidence almost bordering upon cool insolence, as he displayed the perfect certificate.

“ And a very pretty production it would be to print and issue to the world,” observed the Amazon, again coming to her paramour’s assistance.

“ Ah! you would not dare, no, you could not,” gasped the wretched king, as the proof, the damning proof of his atrocious perjury to Hannah Lightfoot was thus placed before his eyes; for a single glance at the document was sufficient to convince him that the missing half was really found, and that no forgery had been accomplished to supply its place.

Sinking back into the seat which he had resumed and quitted with such nervous frequency during this memorable interview, the king covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud in the bitterness of his spirit. He forgot that there were persons present to see and hear him; and even if he had remembered the fact, he could not have suppressed that evidence of emotions profoundly excited.

For nearly five minutes did King George III remain thus absorbed in the most excruciating reflections; and Tim Meagles and the Amazon dared not even exchange glances with each other, for they felt a secret awe at having thus plunged a crowned monarch into so deep an abyss of humiliation and mental pain.

At length the king raised his head hastily, and, beckoning Meagles to approach, he said, in a low and sadly altered tone, “ Am I to understand that the document which you have shown me will be given up when the demand of my son is complied with? ”

“ Your Majesty cannot expect that I should part with so interesting a relic,” observed Meagles. Then, fixing his eyes

significantly upon the monarch's countenance, he added, "Such a piece of paper, sir, is worth a dukedom."

"Heaven protect my son, Heaven guard him from these extortioners, when he succeeds me!" murmured the king, with a slight access of returning irritability; but, immediately suppressing his rising anger and steadying his trembling nerves with all the effort of which he was capable, he said, in a louder tone, "Mr. Meagles, you will not publish that document? You cannot wish to do so? No, no, I am sure you cannot. And now listen to me attentively, very attentively."

His Majesty paused for a few moments, while both Meagles and the Amazon drew nearer toward him.

"You are sensible people, both of you, very sensible people, I am confident," resumed the king; "and you must therefore see that I cannot grant a peerage in this abrupt, sudden, and extraordinary manner. But I will tell you what I can do, Mr. Meagles — and Mrs. Meagles. I will speak to Pitt about Lord Marchmont. I will tell him that I wish to confer a mark of my esteem on that nobleman, and then he will institute inquiries respecting his lordship's family and relatives. You understand me, eh? Well, the name of Mr. Clarendon will thus transpire, and all I want is to be able to bring it on the tapis. The rest is easily managed, easily managed," added the king, speaking in a musing tone to himself rather than addressing his words to those whose ears they, however, reached. "Yes, yes, there will be no difficulty, no difficulty. Mr. Meagles — Mr. Meagles," exclaimed his Majesty, with startling suddenness, after a moment's pause, "you may return to my son and inform him that, for the last time, I consent to help him out of his embarrassment. Within a week or ten days a peerage shall be offered to this Mr. Clarendon of whom you have spoken. In the interval the most rigid secrecy must be maintained respecting the negotiation. I presume that your Mr. Clarendon is as yet ignorant of his daughter's shame?"

Meagles replied in the affirmative.

"So much the better," continued the king, speaking in a more collected manner than he had yet done. "Now, understand me well, Mr. Meagles, — and you also, Mrs. Meagles, — understand me, I repeat, when I say that not a hint of all this must be breathed to Mr. Clarendon until my Minister shall have officially communicated my royal will and pleasure

with regard to him. On the same day that this communication is made, the Prince of Wales shall receive a hint to that effect. Then, and not till then, Mr. Meagles, may it be intimated to Mr. Clarendon that this boon of a peerage, with an accompanying pension, is the price of his silence and forbearance — You know what I mean," added the monarch, impatiently, as he sprang, with characteristic abruptness, from his seat.

"I understand your Majesty fully," said Meagles; "and I thank your Majesty for the gracious promise of which I shall now be the joyful messenger to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

The king scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of this sentence, but retired to the inner room.

Tim Meagles and the Amazon then quitted Windsor Castle, well pleased with the result of their interview.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PRINCESS AMELIA

THE favourite daughter of George III, upon leaving the king in order that he might grant an audience to Mr. Meagles and his fair companion, retired into an adjacent room, where she endeavoured to amuse herself with a book. But, feeling convinced that something unpleasant had occurred in respect to her brother the Prince of Wales, and dreading that such intelligence might produce a disagreeable effect upon her father, her uneasiness became most painful; and when she heard the king talking in a loud and angry tone in the next room, she was quite unable to endure the torture of suspense any longer.

Approaching the door communicating with that apartment, she became a listener just at that point in the discourse when her father, interrupting the Amazon's narrative, dwelt with such emphatic reiteration on the word "misfortune." But it was not until several more sentences had been exchanged between his Majesty and the Amazon, that the Princess Amelia learned the entire truth: namely, that her eldest brother had seduced a young lady of respectable family, that the name of the victim was Octavia Clarendon, that she was related to Lord Marchmont, and that a peerage and pension for the father were suggested as the means of hushing up the girl's disgrace and the heir apparent's treachery.

The Princess Amelia was shocked, certainly, but not particularly amazed. The irregularities, gaieties, and gallantries of her eldest brother were too numerous, too notorious, and too flagrant to be entirely a secret to her; and indeed, the king was often wont to deplore, when alone with his favourite daughter, the course of life which the Prince of Wales was leading.

She was not surprised, then, we say, when from the discourse now passing between his Majesty and the Amazon she gathered the particulars of her brother's new freak and the embarrassment in which it had plunged him; nor was she astonished when her sire so peremptorily and irascibly refused the peerage which was demanded for Mr. Clarendon.

But no pen can depict her amazement and indignation when she heard Meagles take up the thread of the conversation and utter dark menaces. She could scarcely believe her ears; she listened with suspended breath; her bosom was as motionless and still as if she were a marble statue.

"I mean, Sire, that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will not fall alone. If he sink beneath the weight of infamy and shame, he will drag down others with him, — yes, even though it be his own father."

Such were the words which the Princess Amelia caught; such were the words that her brother's emissary dared address to her own father, the King of England!

But the scene which followed was of more ominous significance and more tremendous mysterious import. For Meagles grew bolder; he spoke in a tone of easy defiance to his Majesty; and then came the rapidly exchanged but emphatic sentences concerning the certificate.

The Princess Amelia was stupefied, astounded. Pale as marble, she leaned against the door for support. She heard her father sob, and she could not fly to his assistance. Her limbs were paralyzed, her very breath was suspended. A dumb, dead bewilderment was upon her; an awful consternation held her powerless, motionless, voiceless. Even her eyes did not wink, her lips remained apart, her breast was upheaved and still.

What could the document be that Meagles had produced? What spell did it exercise over her sire? What crime or misfortune on his part had endowed it with such appalling influence?

Fleet as lightning did these questions flash through her brain; but how was her imagination to suggest the answers to them?

Hark! the silence in the next room is now broken again: the king speaks. She listens, as if her life were dependent on catching the words which he utters. He demands that the document be given up to him. Meagles refuses. Nay,

he even declares, with confidence, that its price is a dukedom.

A cold tremor, as if a snake were slowly coiling its slimy folds about her, passed gradually over the form of the princess; for that her father must have committed some dreadful crime, or that Meagles was the depositor of some tremendous secret respecting the royal family, was evident. Otherwise, how would this man have dared not only to bandy words with the King of England, but likewise to dictate his own terms in a tone proving that he had not miscalculated the extent of the terrible influence which he thus wielded over the unhappy monarch?

And now the Princess Amelia heard her sire assent to those conditions, nay, even humiliate himself so far as to admit that he must use subterfuge and artifice with his Prime Minister in order to procure the peerage and the pension for Mr. Clarendon.

A deathlike sensation came upon the wretched princess. She loved her father as dearly as ever child was devoted to a parent; and the discourse which she overheard had revealed things, or rather, excited alarms and apprehensions of so vague, uncertain, yet terrible a character that the chill of the grave appeared to have seized upon her. But this feeling rapidly yielded to one more intense and excruciating still; for when she thought of the deep humiliation to which her father was reduced, and that father a king, she felt as if red-hot iron were searing her heart and drops of molten lead trickling upon her brain. Then, in order to avoid giving utterance to the hysterical cry which rose to her very lips, she suddenly tore herself away from the door to which her ear had hitherto been riveted, and, with steps that were staggering and uneven, although so rapid, she fled to her own apartment.

Throwing herself upon a sofa, the young princess burst into an agony of weeping. Torrents of tears now poured forth from the eyes that had hitherto been so hot and dry; and her bosom, that fair virgin breast, heaved with convulsive sobs, as if her heart must break.

But in a few minutes that flood of anguish was followed by the relief which tears invariably afford, and the violence of her affliction subsided. By degrees, however, she experienced a suffocating sensation, a want of the fresh air, and a longing

to feel the cold breeze fan her burning brow and her flushed cheeks.

Hastily putting on a modest bonnet and a simple scarf lined with furs, the princess descended to the gardens attached to the castle. But perceiving some members of the royal household walking in those grounds, and wishing to give way in solitude to the thoughts which oppressed her, she turned her steps in another direction and entered the park.

So modest was her apparel, so mournful was her demeanour, so woebegone her countenance, and so agitated her walk, that a stranger would never have suspected her to be one of the high-born and envied daughters of England's royalty.

And, in truth, the young princess was thoroughly wretched, for her soul was filled with the gloomiest presentiments in regard to her father, her eldest brother, ay, her entire family; and she could not help thinking, within the profoundest recesses of her own heart, that there was a curse instead of a blessing attendant upon the British crown.

Presently her thoughts settled almost completely upon her eldest brother, the Prince of Wales; and so fully did she become absorbed in contemplating his career and painfully wondering to what ignominious catastrophe it would probably lead, that she forgot the scene which had ere now taken place at the castle.

It was while in this deeply reflective mood, that the Princess Amelia suddenly observed an individual leaning in a melancholy attitude against a tree. Tall, well-formed, and handsomely dressed, this person immediately riveted her gaze; for she felt convinced that it was the object of her thoughts, her brother, George Prince of Wales. His arms were folded across his ample chest, his eyes were fixed on the ground, he was evidently absorbed in deep meditation.

"Ah!" thought the princess within herself, "I understand the meaning of his presence here. Tortured by suspense, he is waiting for his emissaries, to learn the issue of their interview with our august father. Poor brother! with all his faults I love him well, and more than ever now that I am confident he is unhappy. But at least it will be in my power to relieve him of that anxiety which is wringing his soul at present. Yes, I can so far cheer him with the assurance

that the peerage will be granted to Mr. Clarendon, and that the existing cause of a cruel embarrassment will therefore be hushed up."

These ideas rushed through the brain of the tender-hearted and amiable princess in far less time than we have occupied in recording them; and hastily approaching the individual who was leaning against the tree, she threw herself upon his breast, overcome by her feelings, thus making him aware of her presence and her sorrow at the same instant.

The individual started with an amazement which the princess did not, however, perceive, for she was now blinded with her tears and suffocated with her sobs. All the features, all the details, all the particulars of the scene which had taken place within the hour, rushed to her mind: her father's humiliation, Meagles's triumph, the mysterious document, everything sprang into vivid being in her memory. And she knew that her brother was the cause of all the anguish, degradation, and disgrace through which her sire had thus passed. She recollected, moreover, that this same brother it was who had sent his emissaries to threaten, coerce, and intimidate that father whom she so fondly loved; and her gentle spirit was wounded sorely, her kind heart was rent with the cruel paroxysms which were only partially relieved by the torrents of tears that she now shed so abundantly, as she clung to the arms of him who supported her from falling.

"Oh, George, my dearest brother, what have you done?" she exclaimed, at length, but in a voice half-suffocated with sobs. "Is it possible that you could have had recourse to menaces in order to compel your father, your king —"

"In the name of Heaven, illustrious lady, — for that such you are, I gather from your words, — be cautious what you say. There is some strange mistake —"

A shriek burst from the lips of the princess, as she started wildly from the half-embrace in which she was held, or rather, into which she had thrown herself; and casting one searching, penetrating, agonizing look upon the handsome though mournful countenance which now wore an expression of the profoundest respect mingled with a tender interest, she exclaimed, "Just Heaven! what have I done?"

And she would have fallen forward on the ground had not the gentleman caught her in his arms.

But she had fainted.

He threw a rapid look around. Not a soul was nigh to render aid or run for succour, the castle was a mile distant, and there was not even a drop of water near to sprinkle upon the marble brow of the princess, — for such he concluded, from the words she had spoken, that she must be.

Kneeling upon the grass, he sustained her in his arms, loosened the scarf lined with furs from about her neck, unfastened the ribbons of her bonnet, and thus did all he could, consistently with an honourable delicacy and propriety, to give her air.

Then, as she lay thus motionless and deprived of sense in his arms, he could not help being struck by the loveliness of her countenance and the softly rounded outlines of her figure. Even amidst the deep melancholy which filled his breast, there stole into existence a feeling of the tenderest interest as he thus contemplated the inanimate form of the princess. Her face, from which all the colour had fled, was so exquisitely sweet and so touchingly beautiful in its death-like rigidity and its marble hue, that it appeared as if the dream of a poetic genius had been wrought into mimic life by the hand of the statuary. And as the individual who sustained her in his arms gazed on that countenance, a deep, deep sigh rose from the profoundest abyss of his soul; for had any one a few minutes previously assured him that his feelings would be stirred so soon and his heart moved by the beauty of aught in female shape, he would have declared that love for him was as a flower which had faded in his soul, a leaf which had withered, and that nought could reawaken the subtle passion, nor rekindle its volcanic fire to dart through the ruins it had once filled and scorched.

And now a tender bloom began to reappear upon the cheeks of the princess, a deeper tint suffused the lips that were now stirred with the wavering breath of returning animation, her bosom rose and fell slowly, but visibly, and, opening her azure orbs, she gazed up into the countenance that was bending over her.

At first there was a dull vacancy in that look, but the next moment the pupils of those sweet eyes were lighted up with the resuscitating beams of intelligence; and, recollecting all that had occurred, the princess said, in a faint and tremulous tone, "I thank you, sir, for this kind attention on your part. A mistake, a strange mistake —"

And stopping short, as the reminiscence flashed to her mind that she had thrown herself weeping and sobbing upon the breast of a stranger, she blushed the deepest crimson.

"Your Royal Highness may rest assured that I am a man of honour," was the earnest and impressive response, as the gentleman delicately and tenderly assisted the princess to regain her feet; "and the words which fell from your lips ere now shall never be repeated by me. I can well understand how the error occurred, for I am no stranger to the fact that a marvellous resemblance subsists between myself and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

"So extraordinary a likeness I never beheld till now," murmured the Princess Amelia, casting a timid look upon the countenance which still wore an expression of extreme mournfulness mingled with a tender interest. Then, hastily rearranging her dress, she said, "Again I thank you, sir, for the courtesy, nay, the generosity of your behaviour toward me. May I request to be made acquainted with the name of one to whom I shall ever be under a great obligation?"

"Doubtless my romantic history and cruel misfortunes are not altogether unknown even to a lady so highly placed and so far removed from the world's ordinary sphere as your Royal Highness," said the gentleman. "For a short time was I the object of universal execration. A number of crimes, any one of which was sufficient to stamp a man with unredeemable infamy —"

"Ah! I know you, sir, and I sincerely, most sincerely sympathize with your misfortunes," exclaimed the Princess Amelia, a sudden light breaking in upon her memory. "I read your case in the newspapers, and I now recollect full well that mention was made of the extraordinary likeness which you were said to bear to the Royal Family. That the report was indeed true, the incident of this morning has fully proved," she added, casting down her eyes as a blush once more suffused her charming countenance; but almost instantly looking up again, she observed, with a tone and manner of winning artlessness, "Sir Richard Stamford, you are a man of honour, and I need not blush like a guilty thing for an error into which I fell so innocently."

"Your Royal Highness may look upon the incident which has just passed as if it had never occurred," said the baronet.

"Nay, it is not altogether in such a light that I wish to

regard it," exclaimed the princess; "because your conduct toward me has been too generous and too delicately attentive to permit such ingratitude as forgetfulness would be on my part. If you will become my companion to the castle, I shall have much pleasure in presenting you to their Majesties —"

"Gracious princess," Sir Richard Stamford hastened to observe; "you confer too much honour upon me. With delight shall I attend upon your Royal Highness to the immediate precinct of the regal dwelling; but I crave your pardon if I accompany you not beyond the threshold."

"Think you, Sir Richard Stamford, that you will be received with a cold and icy ceremony?" exclaimed the warm-hearted princess. "No, no; I shall frankly and candidly inform my beloved father of the origin of our acquaintance, and he will thank you for your chivalrous behaviour toward his daughter. Come, Sir Richard Stamford, you shall escort me to the castle."

And the Princess Amelia, with the most amiable cordiality of manner, but with all the maidenly dignity and graceful propriety of her rank and sex, took the arm which the baronet scarcely dared to offer her.

"Your Royal Highness," he said, as they proceeded slowly toward the castle, "has honoured me with an invitation which under any circumstances would amount to a command, but which has been given in a tone of such kindness that it were an unpardonable rudeness and a coarse brutality on my part to offer an excuse. Nevertheless, I must incur the risk of your Royal Highness's displeasure."

"You are incapable of deserving it, Sir Richard Stamford," hastily exclaimed the Princess Amelia. "If you do not wish to proceed beyond the threshold of the castle, I shall give you credit for entertaining some good reason for declining my invitation, and we shall not be on less friendly terms on that account."

"Every word your Royal Highness utters lays me under a fresh obligation to you," said Sir Richard Stamford. "Permit me, then, to explain myself. My recent misfortunes have produced an effect which cannot be immediately mitigated, and never can be altogether subdued. A few weeks ago and I was a happy husband, enjoying the blessings of a

cheerful home and a wife whom I adored: now I am alone in the world, widowed in my love, and with my home a wreck. Impelled by a sense of duty toward society as well as by those feelings of vengeance which the most virtuous cannot altogether crush and annihilate at the bottom of their souls, I pursued my enemies until I sent them to the scaffold. Martin and Ramsey perished by the hand of the public executioner; but at the same moment that the drop fell, launching them into eternity, then also ebbd away the excitement which the proceedings taken against them had kept alive in my mind. A deep despondency supervened, and I felt that its influence was irresistible. I fled from the din of London, I sought the retirement of the environs of Windsor. Here have I dwelt for some days past, and when the weight of thought becomes intolerable, I rush out into the open air, I come hither, and in this park do I wander for hours. Sometimes I fear lest I should go mad; at others I seem to tremble upon the verge of suicide."

"Great Heaven! talk not thus, Sir Richard," ejaculated the princess, looking up into his countenance with an expression of such sympathy as a sister might evince toward a well-beloved brother; for she felt herself irresistibly drawn toward that unhappy gentleman whose misfortunes had constituted one of the most extraordinary romances in real life that ever became known to the world.

"I demand the pardon of your Royal Highness," said the baronet. "I am well aware that I ought not to intrude my sorrows upon you! But I was about to ask your Royal Highness whether it be fitting to introduce a man with such a ruined, shattered heart as mine into the presence of your august parents? Oh, no, no; for the deeper the solitude in which I dwell, the more profound the misanthropy in which I shroud myself, the more inveterate the cynicism which henceforth shall characterize my existence —"

"Sir Richard Stamford," interrupted the Princess Amelia, speaking with a gravity which seemed singular not only for her years but likewise for the almost cherub style of beauty which marked her countenance, "you must allow me to assume the part of a counsellor, an adviser, a friend. I will frankly inform you that when I read in the newspapers the romantic narrative of your sorrows and your wrongs, I conceived a boundless compassion for the man who had sustained

such an accumulated weight of misery. Little did I imagine that I should ever encounter the hero of that mournful tragedy. But we have met, and under circumstances forming an appropriate sequence to your wild, wondrous, and touching history. For, at a moment when my own heart was swelling almost to bursting, I mistook you for that brother whose image absorbed all my thoughts, and you checked with a generous, noble, manly warning that outpouring of words which, flowing from my lips, might have conveyed revelations unfitted for any ear save that of a member of the royal family. This conduct on your part has made me your debtor, and has likewise augmented the interest which I already experienced in your behalf. Let me, then, address you as a friend; let me throw aside all affectation, and at once place myself on confidential terms with you. For although I am but a girl in years, yet in maturity of reflection and in steadiness of thought I flatter myself that I am a woman. Permit me, therefore, Sir Richard Stamford, to remind you that ideas of misanthropy and cynicism are not suitable to a man of true courage. No one has a right to withdraw himself from the world and turn hermit. If all who are unhappy were to fly into solitude, what would become of society? It would dwindle down into a waste, a wilderness, a desert. No, misanthropy is not the part which God destined human beings to play in this world. You have been sorely tried; woes of no ordinary magnitude have been heaped upon your head. The greater, then, will become the merit of patience, endurance, resignation."

"This is an angel breathing the sublimest truths in my ears," exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford; and stopping short, dropping the arm of the princess, he turned toward her, fixing his ravished, admiring, almost adoring gaze upon her countenance.

"I thank God that he has enabled my lips to utter words which have touched your heart," said the royal maiden, in a tone of the most holy and most unaffected sincerity. "Were I placed in another sphere," she continued, after a brief pause, "I should insist that you now accompany me home, that you would suffer me to introduce you to my parents, that you would take up your abode with us for a few weeks, so that your bruised spirit might receive the anodyne which is found in cheerful society. But all this may

not be," she added, laying her hand gently upon his arm and looking up mournfully into his countenance. " Nevertheless, as the daughter of your king, I have taken it upon myself to tender you my advice, to offer you the consolation which truthful doctrines may impart — "

• " And you have consoled me, excellent-hearted princess," ejaculated the baronet. " Great heavens! to think that the female voice should ever again have had the power to reach a chord in my heart and make it vibrate! Methought that my soul was dead to all the tender sensibilities which woman's looks or words alone can kindle."

" For a man to entertain such an opinion of himself is the worst kind of skepticism, and must be offensive to his Maker," said the Princess Amelia, in a grave tone; " because it amounts to a denial of that hope which sustains us in our career, and which is an effluence from the divinity itself."

Again did Sir Richard Stamford gaze in mingled admiration and rapture upon that royal maiden whose character was so natural and without disguise, whose manners were so impressive, and yet so winning in their almost infantile simplicity, whose air was dignified, yet attempered by the sweetest feminine timidity, and whose angelic countenance, though tender and languishing, was yet noble in its lineaments and characterized with an expression so purely gentle and confiding.

" Princess," said the baronet, in a voice deeply moved, " had any man prophesied to me an hour ago that it was possible for mortal tongue to pour solace into my soul, I should have shaken my head in token of incredulity; but had any one whispered in my ear that a daughter of the king would condescend even to trouble herself concerning my sorrows, I should have upbraided him with the astounding folly to which he was giving utterance. And yet, my God! both predictions, had they been made, would by this time have received their fulfilment; and on my knees, oh, on my knees, royal lady, must I pour forth the heartfelt gratitude which I experience for the angel part which you have performed toward me! "

And, reckless whether there were thousands of eyes to behold the action, Sir Richard Stamford sank down at the feet of the Princess Amelia, took her hand, pressed it to his

lips, and wept over it. Sweeping a half-terrified glance around, then, bending her looks upon the baronet, when assured that no prying eyes beheld them, the princess felt such strange and undefinable emotions stirring within her bosom that she could not immediately give utterance to the words she wished to speak for the purpose of commanding him to rise from his suppliant posture. New intuitions appeared suddenly to spring up in her soul; and, when she did recover the power of language, it was in a deeply melting tone that she said, "Rise, sir, rise; you may be observed, and what will be thought of us both?"

Recalled to a sense of the inconsiderateness of that action to which, however, a deep and fervent sense of gratitude had impelled him, Sir Richard Stamford sprang to his feet; then, when his eyes again met those of the Princess Amelia, he saw that she was blushing deeply. For the very words which she had last uttered had seemed inscrutably and mysteriously to link and associate themselves with the new feelings which were springing up in her bosom, and this germinating love at first sight — for such indeed it was — produced vague alarms, soft misgivings, and tender apprehensions never known before.

"Here we must part, Sir Richard," she said, after they had walked on for a little while in profound silence.

"Part! What, so soon?" he exclaimed; and had death been the penalty for giving utterance to those words, he would have uttered them all the same, so unwitting, so improvised, so involuntary was the ejaculation.

"Yes, I must return to his Majesty," said the princess, now suddenly recollecting the incidents that had sent her forth from the castle to cool her burning brow in the park, — those incidents which had gradually glided out of her memory in proportion as her interview with the baronet became more intensely interesting.

"Farewell, then, generous-hearted princess," cried Sir Richard Stamford. "No words can convey all the illimitable gratitude which I experience toward you. But let me give your Royal Highness this assurance: that henceforth, when I wish to shape in my imagination the angels that are in heaven, I shall think of you."

Thus speaking, he raised her hand to his lips, kissed it fervently, and then hurried away.

The Princess Amelia watched his retreating form for nearly a minute, at the expiration of which she turned, with a profound sigh, toward the nearest avenue leading to the castle.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CAMILLA

IMMEDIATELY after their interview with the king, Tim Meagles and Lady Lade went back to the hotel, paid the bill, ordered the horses, and returned at a smart pace to London.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the metropolis. The Amazon then hastened to her own home, to satisfy her doting and purblind husband with some excuse to account for her absence; while her paramour repaired to Carlton House.

Meagles found the Prince of Wales alone in his own chamber, not the slightest step toward a reconciliation between himself and Mrs. Fitzherbert having been made by either party; nor, indeed, after the understanding to which the heir apparent had come with his friend and counsellor did he for an instant desire that the quarrel should be patched up. On the contrary, he thought that it would lead all the more easily to that complete rupture which his intensely selfish nature had contemplated and which Meagles had promised to carry into effect.

In order, therefore, to avoid the possibility of meeting Mrs. Fitzherbert, the Prince of Wales had shut himself up in his own room ever since the quarrel on the night of the ball; and during this interval he had divided the time between solitary drinking and feasting his imagination with the charms of Mrs. Brace's beautiful seamstress, Camilla Morton.

The prince was overjoyed when Meagles, on appearing before him, at once put him out of suspense by declaring that the peerage would be granted to Mr. Clarendon.

"And how the devil did you manage it, my dear Tim?" demanded his Royal Highness, chuckling heartily.

"I thought it was an agreement between us that you should ask me no questions relative to the means which I might employ," said Meagles, flinging himself upon a seat and slashing his boot with his riding-whip.

"Ah! truly, and so it was," exclaimed the heir apparent. "Then you saw the king?"

"Yes, we had a long chat with the old gentleman," observed Meagles, speaking of his Majesty in a free and easy, offhand kind of a fashion.

"We!" ejaculated the prince. "And who the devil went with you, then?"

"The Amazon — only the Amazon," answered Tim, quite coolly.

"Nonsense! you are humbugging me!" cried the heir apparent.

"I assure you that it is truth," said Meagles, with a smile. "Lady Lade not only went with me, but likewise appeared before the king in her usual garb."

"And what in the name of everything sublime or ridiculous did our revered parent say?" demanded the prince.

"Only that my wife — as his Majesty took her to be — was a monstrous fine woman," returned Meagles. "But let me tell you that without the Amazon I might not have succeeded at all. She menaced at one moment, coaxed at another, then reasoned, then pleaded, and, in fine, helped me considerably," he added, thus exaggerating the real truth in order to prevent the prince from suspecting that he was in reality possessed of the Lightfoot certificate and had used it at Windsor.

"Capital! Capital!" ejaculated the heir apparent, highly delighted at the idea of Lady Lade appearing with her huntress's garb in the presence of the ceremonious old king. "And when is this peerage to be granted?"

"In a week or ten days; and in the meantime you are to hold your tongue about it. His Majesty is going to manage it very cleverly. He means to wheedle Pitt out of it by dint of sheer artifice; and therefore if a hint, or even the ghost of a rumour should get abroad in the interval —"

"Not a sentence shall fall from my lips, Tim, until the proper time," exclaimed the prince. "If I hear or see anything of the Miss Clarendons, I will manage to appease them for the present somehow or another. And now that you

have contrived to settle one thing for me, — for I consider it to be as good as done, — when shall we set about the other? ”

“ To-morrow, my dear prince,” replied Meagles. “ About two o’clock in the afternoon I shall make my appearance in a genteel suit of black and solicit an immediate interview with Mrs. Fitzherbert. I cannot, of course, say how long our parley may last; but this I promise your Royal Highness, — that she will not sleep beneath your roof to-morrow night.”

“ Bravo, Tim!” ejaculated the prince. “ You are really an excellent fellow. By the bye, I have not found the papers, you know — ”

“ I dare say they will turn up some day or another,” interrupted Meagles, rising from his seat. “ Farewell for the present. To-morrow afternoon I shall pay my respects to your Royal Highness again, the moment I have made all necessary arrangements with Mrs. Fitzherbert.”

“ I shall be anxiously expecting you, Tim,” said the prince, extending his hand to his friend.

Meagles took his departure; and the heir apparent, after cogitating for some minutes upon the successful issue of the trip to Windsor, penned a brief note to Mrs. Brace, informing her that he intended to pay her a visit in the evening and that he should pass the night at her house provided she could induce the beautiful Camilla Morton to share his couch.

Having despatched this letter to the accommodating milliner, his Royal Highness lay down upon a sofa to indulge in a doze until dinner-time. A sort of half-waking dreamy slumber came slowly upon him, and, while having his eyes shut, he pursued a continuous train of reflections, wondering whether he should really ever wear the English crown, and if he did, how the people could be such fools as to let him, and if he did not, what it might be that would prevent him, whether a revolution at home, or the propagandism of republicanism from France. Then he thought of the numerous proofs which the history of the past and the occurrences of the present afforded of the rapid decay of monarchical institutions; and he began to calculate how long the system was likely to last in this country. Ultimately, he indulged in a tolerably hearty chuckle at the despicable folly of that

long-eared jackass, John Bull, who submits to be pillaged and plundered on all sides with so good a grace; and having thus vented his mirth at the expense of those who were one day to become his subjects, or rather, his slaves, he went off into a sound sleep, from which Germain awoke him at about eight o'clock.

This Leviathan of voluptuousness, profligacy, and scoundrelism, this diabolical miscreant whose statue stands in Trafalgar Square as a flagrant insult to the people of Great Britain, and a shame and a scandal to civilization itself, this Prince of Wales, having dressed himself for dinner, sat down alone to the repast, and by means of the bottle whiled away a couple of hours agreeably enough in his estimation.

He then muffled himself in his cloak, quitted Carlton House by the private staircase leading from his own bed-chamber, and passed hastily into St. James's Square. The door of that department of the milliner's establishment was speedily opened; and in a few minutes he was seated with Mrs. Brace in the little parlour to which allusion has been so frequently made in former chapters of our narrative.

To this lady the prince speedily communicated the satisfactory intelligence that her advice had been adopted in respect to the means of propitiating Mr. Clarendon when he should come to know his daughter's shame; and the milliner was well pleased by the intelligence thus conveyed. She then spoke of the issue of the adventure at the ball, the failure of the prince's attempt upon Lady Desborough having been already made known by him in a note which he had written to Mrs. Brace on the ensuing morning. His Royal Highness did not, however, at present seem in a humour to discuss that subject; but, hastily shifting the discourse, he demanded whether she had any good news for him respecting Miss Camilla Morton.

"I will tell you very candidly," answered Mrs. Brace, "that I am at a loss to comprehend this young girl. It was Sunday evening, you remember, that you supped with me, Camilla being present. All Monday I saw little of her, as I was much occupied during the day, and on the night I was at Carlton House, as you are aware. But yesterday I observed that there was some alteration in her manner. She either beheld me with an unwonted degree of timidity, or with suspicion, I know not which. I spoke kindly to her; she answered me

in a tone that struck me as being cold and with an air that seemed reserved. Throughout yesterday she was thus peculiar in her manner, and to-day it has been the same," added the milliner; for it was on the Wednesday evening that the prince and herself were thus conversing together.

"Think you, my dear Fanny," inquired his Royal Highness, "that she suspects who I am?"

"Decidedly not," responded Mrs. Brace. "If she did, she would not hesitate to tell me so, for, with all her natural timidity, she is a girl of a frank, artless, and ingenuous disposition."

"It was thus that I also read her character, on Sunday night," said the prince. "Well, if she do not suspect who I am, what the devil misgiving can she entertain?"

"I know not. Perhaps she has overheard some incautious whisper on the part of the senior girls," added Mrs. Brace, in a musing tone. "There is one, Rachel Forrester, who will soon become a mother; and yet her position is not apparent, nor is she likely to commit any indiscretion in the presence of Camilla. In fact, I am quite bewildered what to make of the girl," exclaimed the milliner, petulantly.

"Then you have not been able to arrange any plan —"

"Nothing at all," interrupted Mrs. Brace, laconically. "The truth is, my dear prince," she observed, after a brief pause and lowering her tone, "Camilla is an orphan and totally friendless, and consequently there is not the same necessity to act in a slow, cautious, careful manner as when a young girl who has parents to fly to is concerned. Now, do you understand me?"

"I should be a perfect idiot if I did not," answered the heir apparent. "You mean, my dear Fanny, that you leave Camilla Morton entirely to my management —"

"Yes, to your tender mercies," said the milliner, darting upon him a look full of significancy.

The Prince of Wales regarded his watch. It was close upon eleven o'clock. The young ladies had all retired to rest; but it was too early to think of putting his diabolical scheme into execution. He accordingly resolved to wait until near midnight; and Mrs. Brace covered the table with all the wines, spirits, and liqueurs that were likely to tempt the palate of his Royal Highness.

Thus, by the aid of curaçoa punch and some delectable

conversation with the handsome milliner, the prince whiled away the time until midnight.

"Now, my dear Fanny, I shall retire — I hope to paradise," said the heir apparent, smiling at his own awful blasphemy. "But should any accident disappoint me, any unexpected event constrain me to beat a retreat, I shall find my way to your chamber, Fanny," he added, caressing her plump cheek with his hand.

"Indeed, my good friend," exclaimed Mrs. Brace, blushing and looking confused, "I must beg and implore you to leave me unmolested, under any circumstances —"

"Well, well," interrupted the prince, smiling significantly, "let us hope that my success with Camilla will be such as to render it unnecessary for me to seek a bed elsewhere. But I understand you, my cunning friend, — you have a little intrigue of your own in progress to-night, eh? There, now, you need not blush nor cast down your eyes. I am well aware that you are not immaculate, and indeed I have no right to question you as to your proceedings. So give me a taper and conduct me to the door of Camilla's room.

Mrs. Brace said not a word, but, with the crimson hue still upon her cheeks, she rose, lighted a wax candle, and led the way noiselessly along the passage into that division of her premises which looked upon St. James's Square; for the sleeping-rooms of the young ladies were all, for obvious reasons, in this latter compartment of the spacious establishment.

Having ascended two flights of stairs, Mrs. Brace gave the prince the candle, whispered the number of a certain room, and then rapidly withdrew.

His Royal Highness advanced along a passage which was so thickly carpeted that even if he had trodden as heavily as a cart-horse the sounds of his steps would have been deadened by the rich fabric. In a few moments he reached the room which had been described to him; and the door yielded to his hand. But on entering a small antechamber, he carefully closed it again behind him.

This antechamber was only a few feet square, just large enough to contain a bath. Facing the entrance by which the prince had made his way hither was a second door; and from beneath it as well as through the keyhole glimmered a feeble light. It was evident, therefore, that a candle

burned in Camilla Morton's room; and the prince accordingly extinguished the wax light which he carried in his hand.

He now stooped down and peeped through the keyhole.

The young girl had not retired to rest. Seated at a table on which her elbow rested, and with her head supported languidly upon her hand, she had a book before her; but, though her eyes were fixed upon it, she evidently was not reading. Her entire attitude, as well as the expression of her countenance, denoted deep thought. She was plunged in a profound reverie; and the subject of her meditations was not of a joyous description, for on each pale cheek a tear glistened in the feeble rushlight.

She had not as yet made the slightest preparation for retiring to rest. Her hair was still in the graceful bands in which she wore it, and in which arrangement it set off her intellectually beautiful and sweetly pensive countenance. Her deep mourning dress displayed the dazzling fairness of her complexion to its greatest advantage, and likewise developed the perfect symmetry of her sylphlike form.

For several minutes did the royal voluptuary contemplate his intended victim by means of the keyhole; and the longer he gazed upon her, the more ardently did he burn to possess her.

And that she would become his prey beyond all possibility of salvation or rescue, he did not doubt; for well aware was he that every chamber in this department of the milliner's establishment was so skilfully and artfully arranged that no screams to which the tongue might give vent in one room could be heard in another. Besides, even if it were not so, the inmates of Mrs. Brace's abode were not of a character likely to afford the succour which even the acutest lamentation or the most rending entreaties might implore.

And with truth did we observe that the reverie of Camilla Morton was far from felicitous; for she did entertain suspicions not only with regard to the respectability of Mrs. Brace's establishment, but likewise concerning the good faith and sincerity of the milliner herself. The incidents of the preceding Sunday evening had opened the eyes of the young girl, artless and confiding as she was. The attempt of the guest, whom she only knew as Mr. Harley, to kiss her hand had shocked her for the moment; and the indignant glance which she threw upon him expressed all the dignity of

her maidenhood smarting under an insult. But on returning to her own chamber, the suspicion already engendered in her mind kindled into the worst fears; and her sleepless pillow was moistened with the orphan's bitter weeping. No wonder was it, then, that Mrs. Brace had since observed an alteration in her manner; and now, on this Wednesday night on which we find her plunged in deep thought at that midnight hour, and in the solitude of her own room, she is deliberating what course she ought to pursue.

Alas! alas! now is it that the poor girl experiences all the loneliness of her position in the world. Her parents have been snatched away from her; she has not a relative, to her knowledge, upon the face of the earth. Like the keen and cutting blast of December blowing upon the naked form of the shivering mendicant, comes the piercing and icy sense of her utter isolation to the heart of the young orphan girl.

In Mrs. Brace she had hoped to find a mother. Pure, innocent, unsuspecting, and confiding, she beheld a matronly kindness in the woman's manner which speedily won her naturally warm and inexperienced heart. The rigid decorum which outwardly reigned amongst the young ladies led her to regard them with a sisterly affection. She was therefore at first completely happy, or rather, as happy as a maiden who had so recently lost her parents could possibly hope to be. But suddenly the film fell from her eyes, the veil was torn rudely away, and one little incident threw all her ideas and sentiments respecting the house and its inmates into another channel. Receiving, as it were, new intuitions, she now recognized the impropriety of Mrs. Brace's conduct in sending her with a note to Lord Florimel; and she remembered how intently the eyes of Mr. Harley were fixed upon her at supper on the Sunday evening. In spite of her purity, in spite of her artlessness, in spite of her ignorance on many matters, the maiden had obtained a glimmering of the truth; and the exercise of her reason soon developed her comprehensive faculties to an extent sufficient to produce the conviction that the milliner meditated anything rather than a mother's part toward her.

Behold her, then, seated in the solitude of her chamber and at this midnight hour, revolving in her imagination the best means of quitting Mrs. Brace's establishment as soon as possible. She did not like to reveal with abruptness the

motive which prompted her to take so decisive a step; for she thought within herself that if her suspicions should happen to be unfounded in respect to the milliner, how grieved she would be at having proclaimed them. And yet she must make up her mind speedily, — it was a matter admitting not of delay, — and all timidity or hesitation must be conquered in order to accomplish a duty. Camilla, then, determined to quit the house on the ensuing morning. Already had she acted with weakness in remaining there three whole days after the incident of Sunday evening.

Such were the thoughts occupying her imagination, when a sound, as if the handle of the door were turning, fell upon her ears.

She started from her seat, the door opened, and Mr. Harley stood before her.

A scream burst from the maiden's lips; then, the first feeling of terror passing away in a moment, the warm blood of indignation surged up to her cheeks, her brow, her very ears.

"Adorable girl," exclaimed the prince, extending his arms toward her, "look not thus angrily upon me. Blame not me, blame your beauty, which possesses irresistible fascinations."

The temporary courage with which anger had armed the orphan abandoned her suddenly as these words fell upon her ears with the effect of a shock; and, sinking upon a seat, she burst into tears.

"My dearest Camilla," exclaimed the prince, closing the door behind him, "this is but a sorry reception which you give me. Hear me, my angel, hear me declare that I adore you, that I will never cease to love you, that I will do all I can to render you happy. Come, permit me to kiss away the tears from those beauteous eyes —"

"Begone, sir!" ejaculated the maiden, a burning sense of outrage restoring to her the courage which she had lost. "Begone, sir!" she cried, starting from the chair and pointing toward the door.

"One word, Camilla, only one word," said the prince, quite prepared for this opposition to his desires.

"Not a syllable, sir!" was the response, delivered even in a stern tone.

"Nay, then you must hear me perforce," exclaimed his Royal Highness, leaning his back against the door.

Camilla, astonished at this hardihood, for she could scarcely have believed that any man would have been guilty of such cowardly brutality toward a defenceless female, gazed upon the prince with a stupefaction which, coming suddenly upon her, struck her speechless and motionless.

"My dear girl," resumed the prince, hastily taking advantage of the pause, "you must be made to understand how matters exist between us. The truth is, then, that you are ravishingly beautiful, and I am desperately enamoured of you. You are at present nothing but a poor seamstress, and I will elevate you into a fine lady. Instead of plying the needle all day, you shall ride in a carriage, have servants to wait upon you, and dwell in a nice house of your own. All this will I do for you, Camilla, if you only consent to my wishes. And if not, then shall I compel your stubborn virtue to surrender; for your strength against mine will be as that of the infant child in the grasp of a giant, and to your screams no succouring voice will respond."

His Royal Highness paused, in the expectation that Miss Morton would vouchsafe some reply, but though her lips were apart, yet they did not even quiver as if about to speak; a spell seemed to hold her tongue in thraldom. And, with eyes that almost glared wildly, did she continue to gaze upon the countenance of him who had thus deliberately made known to her his fiendish resolves; but her manner, her air, her looks were those of a young creature on whom a tremendous consternation has fallen, paralyzing every organ, stupefying every sense, retaining every faculty in abeyance.

Gloatingly over her slight but exquisitely modelled figure wandered the eyes of the prince; and although the body of her dress was so modestly fashioned that not even a glimpse could be obtained of her bosom, yet did the shape of the closely fitting corsage afford an external indication of the firmness and roundness of those globes which imagination could not err in depicting of snowy whiteness.

"Sweetest, dearest, loveliest girl," exclaimed the prince, maddened with desire as he glanced from Camilla's fascinating form to the bed which stood near, "delay not in rendering me completely happy, and my life shall be devoted to your service."

At that instant, the girl awoke, as it were, from the stupefaction of a dream to complete consciousness, and with the vividness of lightning did a thought strike her.

"Mr. Harley," she said, forcing herself even to smile faintly, "you expect too easy a conquest, and you will not value it."

"Oh, this is indeed an unexpected bliss, to hear you talk thus, to find that you do not repulse me any longer," exclaimed the prince, intoxicated with delight. "Camilla, sweetest Camilla —"

"If you really love me, Mr. Harley," said the young girl, bending down her looks, while her cheeks became flushed with the deepest crimson, "you will retire immediately, and to-morrow I shall be happy to listen to you —"

"No, no, we cannot separate thus, dear creature," ejaculated his Royal Highness. "I beseech you, I implore you to render me completely happy this night —"

"Leave me, then, for half an hour — twenty minutes — or even ten minutes," interrupted Camilla, speaking in a low tone but with rapid utterance. "Have pity upon my shame, my confusion —"

"Yes, for ten minutes will I leave you, sweetest girl," said the Prince, imagining that she did not choose to lay aside her apparel in his presence. "One kiss first, only one kiss as a foretaste of the indescribable joys —"

"No, not now, not now!" cried the orphan, hysterically, as he approached her with outstretched arms. "If I must surrender myself to you, let it be in total obscurity, utter darkness —"

"It shall be as you desire," exclaimed the prince, sweeping his eyes around the small but neatly furnished chamber to assure himself that there was no second door by which the beauteous bird might take wing into a place of security. Then, satisfied that escape was impossible and that she was completely in his power, he said, "Ten minutes only, my angel, ten minutes of mortal delay, and at the expiration of the interval I shall return to find you ready to clasp me in your arms."

And glancing significantly toward the couch, he quitted the room, retiring into the antechamber.

The moment he had crossed the threshold, Camilla locked the door behind him and extinguished the light.

Then, without an instant's delay, the heroic girl noiselessly but speedily commenced the execution of a plan which had struck her as the only alternative to be adopted for the purpose of rescuing herself from the power of a man so resolutely bent upon sacrificing her to his brutal passions.

Armed with a desperate courage, that courage which could alone have prompted her pure soul to have recourse to the stratagem of appearing to yield to the villain's wishes in order to induce him to quit the room, Camilla Morton addressed herself to the task which she had in hand. Stripping the sheets from the bed, she rolled them up in a suitable manner and fastened them together; then she took the scissors which were suspended to a ribbon beneath her apron, and in a few minutes the bed-curtains were cut down. The window-drapery was next called into requisition; and with all these materials Camilla speedily made a long, stout, and efficient rope.

The ten minutes had now expired, and the prince knocked impatiently at the door. But so lightly had the young girl moved about the room, so cautiously had she conducted her operations, so skilfully had she hushed even the sounds of the scissors, that the heir apparent entertained not the slightest suspicion of her design or the faintest idea of her proceedings. His desires, heightened by the gloating revels of his own sensual imagination, alone rendered him impatient; for he pictured to himself the sweet virgin charms, which he conceived to be by this time divested of their apparel, in readiness to be offered up as a rich banquet to his salacious appetite.

Impatiently, then, did he knock at the door; and the sweet voice of the orphan murmured from the other side, "Only another minute, Mr. Harley, and you may enter."

The prince was in raptures; he already felt as if he were standing upon the threshold of paradise. But, ah! all in a moment a sound as of a window opening met his ears. With suspended breath he listened: yes, it was a window being lifted up, and within that room, too! What did it mean? Could the young girl be meditating suicide?

Horried by the thought, his Royal Highness burst the door open. There was no light in the room; of that he was already aware, since he had vainly applied his eyes to the keyhole on quitting the chamber for the proscribed ten

minutes. But the moon shone brightly into the room through the open casement.

A cry of horror burst from the lips of the prince as the truth became suddenly revealed to him. Springing to the window, he looked forth, and his brain reeled with horror as he beheld the orphan descending from that dizzy height of two stories into what appeared, as he glanced down, to be a dark abyss below.

A sensation of sickness seized upon him, a vertigo sprang whirlingly up in his head, he clapped his hand to his brow, and, staggering back, would have fallen on the floor had he not leaned against the table which had been drawn up close to the window in order that the rope might be fastened to one of its legs.

Recovering himself almost immediately, the prince looked forth again, and his eyes met the upturned countenance of the orphan girl as she paused to rest her light feet for a single instant on the projecting woodwork overhanging the front door. The moon shone as though all its effulgence were poured upon the face of Camilla, that beautiful face on every lineament of which was depicted the noble heroism of a virgin resolute in saving her honour or perishing in the attempt.

"Camilla, sweet Camilla, dearest Camilla," murmured the prince, in a tone of almost anguished entreaty, as the rapid glance which he threw around the square showed him that no one was nigh to behold this tremendous scene; "remain there, I implore you, until I come down to receive you in my arms."

But, darting up at him a look full of indescribable contempt and scorn, for the disposition of the brave girl was too noble to harbour hatred, she once more trusted her light, aerial form to the rope, and glided in safety upon the pavement of St. James's Square.

The Prince of Wales beheld the issue of the heroic deed, and then breathed more freely, for the danger that the orphan would be dashed to pieces, and her death traced to his persecution of her, had suddenly passed away. Considerably relieved, in one sense, but bitterly disappointed and chagrined in another, he hastily drew up the rope and closed the window; then, after a few moments' deliberation with himself whether he should arouse Mrs. Brace to acquaint

her with what had occurred, or whether he should return to Carlton House and send her a note with full particulars in the morning, he decided upon the latter course. For he remembered that the amorous milliner had some little intrigue of her own in progress, and he therefore thought it better not to disturb her.

He was turning away from the chamber whence Camilla Morton had so strangely and desperately escaped, when something white upon the carpet attracted his notice; and as the object resembled a letter, he picked it up. And a letter it was, doubtless dropped accidentally by the maiden in the hurry of what may be almost literally termed her precipitate flight.

Curiosity prompted the Prince of Wales to examine the note by the light of the moon, which was shining so powerfully that it made the atmosphere resemble a halo of transparent quicksilver; but the instant that his eyes fell on the address of that letter he started, as if a viper had suddenly bitten him.

The letter dropped from his hand, and this incident appeared to recall him to himself. Picking it up again, he thrust it into his breast, and then quitted the apartment with a gloom upon his countenance darker than the obscurity of the antechamber which he traversed or of the corridor into which he thence passed.

Groping his way to the staircase, the Prince of Wales lost no time in departing from a house where, in addition to being thoroughly baffled by Camilla's heroic flight, he had just received a severe shock from the glimpse which he had caught of the address on the outside of the letter.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ANOTHER INCIDENT OF THE SAME NIGHT

THE reader will not require to be told that it was no ordinary amount of courage which had sustained Camilla Morton throughout the desperate proceeding which she adopted to save her honour from the libidinous profligate by whom it was menaced. But the instant she touched the pavement with her feet, the moment that her safety was assured and the tremendous gulf passed, a powerful reaction took place in her mind, and she burst into a flood of tears. Her limbs suddenly appeared to fail her, and scarcely had she dragged herself around the corner of the adjacent street leading from St. James's Square into Pall Mall, when she was compelled to lean against some railings for support.

At this moment a man and a woman passed that way; but beholding a genteelly dressed young girl without bonnet, cloak, or scarf, and apparently convulsed with grief, they stopped and spoke to her.

"What ails you, miss?" inquired the woman, assuming as pleasing and mild a tone of voice as possible, which was not very difficult, by the bye, inasmuch as her tones were naturally far from disagreeable.

Camilla raised her eyes the moment those words, pronounced by one of her own sex, met her ears; and, encountering the pale but rather pretty face of a young woman who looked kindly upon her, she became animated with hope and confidence.

"I have just escaped from the power of some one who menaced me with violence and outrage," she said, in a hasty and excited tone; "and I implore you to see me to a place of safety. I have but little money about me at this moment; but I possess ample means of procuring funds to-morrow —"

"Well, you take the young lady along with you," said the man; "and I'll just go about the little business I have in hand."

Camilla started at the roughness of the voice which thus sounded on her ears, and which formed so disagreeable a contrast with that of the woman; nor was she reassured when, on glancing at the man's countenance, she observed it was villainous-looking in the extreme.

The woman instantaneously perceived the effect thus produced upon the young lady, and hastened to exclaim, "My husband is a rough diamond, miss, but he is a true one, for all that. A more generous-hearted man never broke bread, I can assure you."

"And I wouldn't injure a fly, miss," added the man, concealing behind his back the huge club which he held in one hand, and thrusting down with the other the butt-end of a pistol that peeped out of his pocket. "But I'll leave you to my missus, young lady, and she'll take as much care of you as if she was your own natural parent."

Thus speaking, the man made a sort of bow, and hurried away.

"Come, miss, and I will take you to my lodging, which isn't very far off," said the woman. "My husband is a cattle-drover, you must know, and is going to drive some beasts to Smithfield Market presently. That's why we are out so late, or rather, so early in the morning. I was going with him; but now I shall have more pleasure in placing you in safety."

The woman spoke with such an air of candour, honesty, and sincerity that she succeeded in removing from Camilla's mind the disagreeable impression which the sinister countenance, rough voice, and coarse manners of her companion had made upon it; and the young lady, therefore, no longer hesitated to accompany her. But before they moved away from the spot, the woman took off her cloak and insisted that Camilla should wrap herself up in it; and as the garment had a hood to it, the maiden was thoroughly protected from the cold.

This proof of kindness won Camilla's entire confidence; and away she sped with her new friend.

We must now return once more to the interior of Mrs. Brace's house.

It was nearly one o'clock, twenty minutes had elapsed since the flight of Camilla and the departure of the prince, and the milliner slept soundly, little dreaming what momentous incidents had taken place beneath her roof that night.

A light burned upon the toilet-table in her bedchamber, and the embers of a fire were smouldering in the grate.

The curtains were drawn completely around the couch, whence came the slow and steady respiration of two persons; for, in plain truth, the milliner was sleeping in the arms of a lover.

Who he was matters not at present.

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning, we said, and a profound silence reigned throughout the establishment.

But suddenly this solemn stillness was broken by some one stumbling on the stairs, and Mrs. Brace started up in alarm. Her companion slept on, undisturbed by the sound, and she did not choose to awake him; for it struck her at the instant that the noise which had aroused her must be caused by the Prince of Wales, who, in spite of the injunction she had given him, was groping his way to her chamber. Such was Mrs. Brace's impression.

She listened as she sat up in the bed, and now, distinctly as she could count the beating of her palpitating heart, did she hear footsteps stealthily approach the door.

Convinced that it was his Royal Highness, who, having, no doubt, failed in his attempt elsewhere, was resolved to share her couch, and angry to think that she could not be allowed to enjoy her own amour in tranquillity and privacy, Mrs. Brace got up, opened the door, and immediately found herself face to face with an individual who unceremoniously advanced into the chamber.

The light from the toilet-table fell upon his countenance, and, to her unspeakable horror, she recognized the Magsman, her husband!

"Well, my love, I come to see you at all hours, you observe," he said, chucking her under the chin.

"What in the name of Heaven do you want now?" demanded the wretched woman, impetuously dashing down his hand with her own. "If it be money, name the sum and the place whither it is to be sent, but leave me this moment," she added, frightened almost to death lest her lover should awake.

"Now, don't be flurried, my love," said the Magsman, with the most provoking coolness; "for you know very well that I am of rather an obstinate disposition, and therefore the more impatient you are to get rid of me, the longer will be my visit. But I don't hesitate to set your mind at ease on one thing, which is that I'm not in any particular want of blunt at this moment."

"Then what do you require?" demanded Mrs. Brace, not daring to look toward the bed for fear the ruffian should suspect she had a companion there and should treat him with as little ceremony but in as extortionate a manner as he did the Prince of Wales on that evening when his Royal Highness was concealed behind the curtain in the milliner's parlour.

"What do I require?" repeated Joe Warren. "Why, it will take me a few minutes to describe —"

"Then why not come to-morrow evening, or write to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, grasping at the hope that the suggestions would prove satisfactory and induce him to leave her.

"You're a fool, Fanny," returned the Magsman, laconically. "How the devil do you suppose that I can go walking about London of an evening, after escaping out of Newgate and having no end of rewards offered for my apprehension? No, no, old gal, that won't do, I can tell you. The middle of the night is the time for me, until I get a free pardon."

"A free pardon!" ejaculated Mrs. Brace, who was standing all this while in her night-dress and shivering alike with cold and apprehension. "You cannot dream of such a thing! Who is to obtain a free pardon for you?"

"Yourself, my dear," responded the Magsman; "and it was to consult you thereupon that I paid you this visit to-night."

"I obtain you a free pardon! Consult me!" exclaimed the amazed and bewildered milliner. "You must either be mad or joking, and surely this is not the hour to make a jest of people."

"By Satan! it is no jest, I can tell you!" ejaculated Warren. "Come, listen attentively for a few minutes, and our business can be soon settled. I'm sorry to keep you standing in the cold, my love," added the fellow, with a leer; "but unless you like to return to your bed and admit me —"

"Go on, go on," cried Mrs. Brace, petulantly; "what have you to say? I am all attention. Speak!"

"Well, you know, in the first place, that there's no end of charges against me, and ever so many rewards offered for my apprehension," resumed the Magsman; "and you have no doubt guessed before this that I had a hand in upsetting the government van into the Devil's Punch-bowl and letting loose the convicts. But it wasn't out of any love for the whole of them, but merely to restore my friends, the Big Beggarman and Briggs, to freedom. Well, such a complication of things hanging over my head makes it unpleasant, very unpleasant, I can assure you, my dear; and my two friends that I have just named to you, one of whom, the Beggarman, had the honour of paying his respects to you at this house one night —"

"Cease this bantering tone, and speak seriously and to the point," said the milliner, sharply; and all this while she wondered how it was that her lover had not awakened, or, if he were aroused, how he could remain so silent in the presence of such a strange scene.

"I'm coming to the point as quick as I can," said the Magsman. "In fact, I was just going to tell you that my two friends, the Beggarman and Briggs, feel themselves as much put out as I do by having to play at hide-and-seek about London, and not being able to go back to our usual haunts. And then, there's Lizzy Marks, — my young woman, you know, who called upon you about the Newgate affair, — she doesn't feel herself quite comfortable either; for the runners are looking after her as well as me and my other two pals. And therefore we have all come to a determination to get a free pardon; and if that can't be done, we shall be satisfied if the home secretary will withdraw the offers of reward for our capture, and just give the Bow Street functionaries a hint to look another way when they chance to see any of us coming along."

"You must be mad to think that I have the means of performing one hundredth part of all this," cried Mrs. Brace, who had listened with poignant impatience to her husband's explanations. "I know what you mean, I understand whose assistance you fancy that I can obtain in your behalf —"

"And, by Heaven, he shall assist!" ejaculated the Magsman, ferociously. "Come, write me a certificate, or acknowledgment, or whatever you may choose to call it, in precisely

the terms which I shall dictate; and then I'll try whether I can't make his Royal Highness — "

"Hush! the very walls have ears," said the milliner, in an imploring tone. "What do you require me to write?"

"An acknowledgment that you are the prince's mistress," answered the Magsman.

"Silence! begone!" almost screamed the wretched woman, driven to despair.

"Damnation! do you dare me outright?" exclaimed the Magsman, in a ferocious tone. Then, drawing a pistol from his pocket, he said. "By Satan! you shall do as I command you, or — "

"Mercy! mercy!" groaned the milliner, falling upon her knees and clasping her hands with an air of passionate entreaty.

"Don't be a fool and no harm will happen to you," said the Magsman. "I don't want your life, it's no use to me; but I will have what I ask for, — a written acknowledgment that you've been unfaithful to me, your lawful husband, and that his Royal Highness — "

"Be silent, I command, I implore, I beseech you!" cried Mrs. Brace, in a tone of stifling agony.

"Then give me the paper, get up from your knees and write it at once — "

"No, never, never!" exclaimed the milliner. "You are mad to ask it, you must kill me first — "

"By Satan! I will, too," interrupted the Magsman, ferociously, as he presented the pistol at his wife.

A shriek burst from the lips of the affrighted woman; but at the same instant — quick as the eye can wink — a man sprang from behind the curtain of the bed, dashed the pistol from the ruffian's hand, and, bounding past him toward the toilet-table, extinguished the light.

All this was the work of a moment, and the room was suddenly involved in total darkness. Indeed, with such rapidity was the whole proceeding accomplished that the Magsman did not even catch the faintest glimpse of the countenance of the individual who had so abruptly and unexpectedly emerged from the bed.

Fortunately the pistol did not explode, or serious injury, if not death, might have been the result.

"Villain! attempt no violence, or, by Heaven, it shall be

a struggle of life and death between us," exclaimed a firm, decided, and manly voice the instant that darkness fell upon the scene.

With a savage grow, the Magsman stooped to pick up his pistol; but it was snatched away from him at the very moment that his hand touched it, Mrs. Brace's unknown lover having simultaneously sought for the weapon. A terrible imprecation burst from the lips of Joe Warren, as through the intense darkness he aimed a blow with his bludgeon which would have told with murderous effect had it reached him for whom it was intended. But the unknown had already stepped aside, the next instant the Magsman was tripped up, and Mrs. Brace, throwing up the window, was on the point of screaming for assistance, when the villain, seeing that his position had suddenly become alarming, exclaimed, "Silence, Fanny! don't raise the neighbourhood, and I'll take myself off at once."

"Begone, then!" said the unknown individual, releasing the ruffian from the strong grasp which he had laid upon him the moment that he had tripped him up.

The Magsman rose and beat a hasty retreat, without uttering another word; not that he was afraid to struggle with his unknown and unseen foe even unto the very death, but because he was well aware that if a disturbance were created in the house, it would probably end in his arrest, and he had presence of mind enough to recollect that although he had escaped once out of Newgate, he could not hope to perform the same feat a second time.

"Get you back to bed, Fanny," said the unknown; "while I just slip on some clothing and assure myself that the fellow leaves the house."

"For God's sake, beware of him, my lord," murmured the milliner; "or he will do your lordship a mischief."

"Fear nothing," was the response; and the nobleman, for such he was, stole from the room.

And now a most extraordinary incident crowned the adventure which we are relating. For the nobleman, gliding hastily down the stairs in the pitchy darkness which prevailed, overtook the Magsman near the bottom; and, laying his hand upon the villain's shoulder, he said, in a low but impressive whisper, "One word with you, my friend."

"Well, what now?" demanded the Magsman, in a voice

scarcely even as agreeable as the growl of a tiger roused from its nap by the stick of the menagerie keeper. "If you mean mischief —"

"I mean nothing of the kind," was the curt and decisive interruption. "On the contrary, you are just the very sort of man for whom I have been seeking these months past, and I am delighted that accident should have thrown such a desperate fellow as you are in my way."

"Then why did you interfere with me up-stairs?" demanded the Magsman, gruffly, and more than half-inclined to immolate, or attempt the immolation of, the unknown with his club.

"Because," replied the nobleman, unhesitatingly, "in the first place, it was necessary, to protect a female from violence, even though that female be, as I understand from what passed, your own lawful wife; secondly, because it was equally necessary to prevent you from creating a disturbance calculated to alarm the household and expose the fact of my presence in Mrs. Brace's bedroom; and thirdly, because I can put you in the way of earning a sum of money which shall be ample enough to render you independent for the rest of your days in a foreign land."

"This last reason is one which I understand best of all," said the Magsman. "But are you in earnest, or do you meditate some plan to entrap me?"

"Fool!" ejaculated the nobleman, contemptuously; "do you take me for a Bow Street runner?"

"I don't know what the devil to take you for," rejoined the Magsman.

"Nor do I intend to enlighten you," said the nobleman. "But although you could not see me in the bedroom just now, I had a good view of your precious countenance from behind the curtain, and if I were an artist I could paint it from memory to-morrow, to the very life."

"You're complimentary, at any rate," observed Warren, laconically. "But about this business you hinted at —"

"We cannot discuss it now; nor must your wife up-stairs, no, nor a living soul, save with my consent, become cognizant of what may pass between you and me on another occasion. You know the road in Hyde Park that runs along the border of Kensington Gardens?"

"I do. What next?" demanded the Magsman.

"Amuse yourself with a stroll up and down that road next Sunday evening, from nine to ten o'clock," said the nobleman; "mind and be alone. You will then know more."

"I shall not fail you," answered Warren; "for this looks like business."

"It will prove a lucrative one to you, my good friend," responded the nobleman. "But you must now be off as quickly as possible, and I shall see you as far as the front door."

The Magsman moved on in obedience to this hint; and fruitlessly did he strain his eyes to penetrate the darkness and catch a glimpse of the unknown's countenance. The obscurity was impervious; and on groping their way into the shop, the nobleman threw a silk handkerchief over his head, so that when the door should be opened the rays of the moon might not stream upon his features.

This precaution therefore baffled the last chance which the Magsman had of obtaining some idea of the personal appearance of the singular individual who from having been a resolute foe promised to become a generous patron.

"Good night," said Warren, as he crossed the threshold into Pall Mall; "or rather, good morning."

"Here, take your pistol," whispered the nobleman, placing the weapon in his hand.

The Magsman muttered a word of thanks, thrust the pistol into his pocket, and took his departure at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ORPHAN

WE have already, in a previous chapter of this narrative, glanced at the maze of vile and crowded streets lying in the immediate vicinity of Westminster Abbey; and it was into this morass of brick and mortar, swarming with human reptiles, that Camilla was led by the woman who had manifested so much apparent interest in her behalf.

During the walk from the vicinity of St. James's Square, Camilla had ingenuously and frankly confided to the woman enough of her history to show that she was an orphan, that she had a few hundred pounds standing in her own name at the Bank of England, and that she had been compelled, even at so late an hour in the night, to flee precipitately from an establishment in which she had been engaged, but where she had suddenly encountered treatment of the most dishonourable kind. She did not, however, mention the name of Mrs. Brace, nor did she explain the manner in which she had escaped from her house. A lingering sentiment of delicacy and forbearance rendered her silent on the former point, and she imagined that she should not be believed were she to enter into details respecting the latter.

The woman expressed the deepest sympathy on Camilla's behalf, declaring that it was fortunate the young lady had fallen in with her, as she would take the greatest care of her until she had decided what course to adopt, and concluding with a strong eulogy on her husband, whom she represented to be "the most kind-hearted of men, although his occupation of a drover had somewhat marred his good looks by exposing him to all weathers and leaving him little leisure to attend to his personal appearance."

In fact, the woman spoke with an air of so much sincerity

that Camilla not only placed implicit confidence in her, but was even angry with herself for having allowed the sinister countenance of her husband to produce a disagreeable impression on her mind or excite a momentary suspicion.

Nevertheless, when the woman led the way into that maze of sombre-looking streets, the sudden plunge, as it were, from the glorious moonlight into the obscurity of narrow lanes and the positive darkness of vile alleys, produced the effect of a shock upon the young girl, and, catching her companion by the arm, she said, in a tremulous tone, "Whither are we going?"

"To my lodgings, which are close by," was the answer, delivered in so calm and collected a voice and with such a reassuring manner that Camilla felt ashamed of her terror. "Poor people, my dear young lady, are obliged to dwell in strange-looking neighbourhoods," added the woman.

"Alas! that is too true," murmured the orphan, as she continued her way by her companion's side.

In a few minutes the woman stopped in one of the sombre streets, opened a door with a latch-key, and said, "This is my abode, miss; it is humble, but you are welcome."

Camilla's heart sank within her at the appearance of the place; and yet the woman's words and manner were kind, honest, and reassuring. Overcoming her scruples, therefore, by a desperate effort, and exerting all her power to stifle the suspicions that again sprang up in her bosom, the young lady crossed the threshold, plunging, as it were, into the most pitchy darkness.

The woman shut the door, and requested Camilla to wait one moment in the passage while she entered an adjacent room to procure a light. The half-minute which now elapsed seemed to the maiden a perfect age; and her apprehensions increased to such an extent and with such rapidity that they rose into ideas of horror developing themselves in ghastly numbers. But suddenly a light gleamed forth from the open door of the room, the woman reappeared, with a candle in her hand, and the look which Camilla threw upon her encountered so much placidity of expression on her pale and interesting features, that again were her fears dissipated in an instant, and again was she bitterly vexed with herself for entertaining suspicions which were most probably

injurious in the extreme to the female who was affording her a generous hospitality.

The candle revealed a small narrow passage with dingy walls and a staircase at the extremity; and up this flight the woman led the way, Camilla now following her with renewed confidence. A small but cleanly bedchamber on the first floor received them; and the woman intimated that it was here the young lady was to sleep. She again apologized for the humility of the accommodation, but again likewise affirmed an assurance of the most cordial welcome. Camilla expressed her thanks for the kindness demonstrated toward her, and the woman, placing the candle upon a little table, withdrew.

Carefully locking the door, the orphan hastened to lay aside her clothing, for she was overwhelmed with fatigue; and soon after she had laid her head upon the pillow slumber sealed her eyes.

She awoke in the morning just as the clock of Westminster Abbey was striking nine; and when the sunbeams shone upon her eyes and she found herself safe in that homely room but cleanly bed, she again reproached herself for having thought ill of the couple to whom she was indebted for the hospitality she had enjoyed.

Rising from the humble pallet, Camilla performed her toilet; but, during the operation, tears more than once trickled down her cheeks as she thought of the really comfortable home from which she had been compelled to fly, and of the necessity of finding another.

Another home! Alas! alas! 'tis much more easily said than done; and the orphan felt that it was so, and her heart, as it were, came up into her throat as she reflected that the only true home which she had ever enjoyed had been swallowed up in the grave of her parents.

O God! robbery is bad, forgery is vile, rape is atrocious, and murder is abhorrent; but to ill-treat the orphan, to be merciless toward the poor being from whom death has borne away the fond mother and doting father, never to send them back again, oh, this is abhorrent also, and the wretch who has no pity for the orphan is capable of robbery and forgery and rape and murder.

Scarcely was Camilla's toilet performed, when some one tapped gently at the door. She opened it, and the woman

made her appearance, with many anxious inquiries as to how the young lady had slept. This apparently kind solicitude on her behalf having been duly acknowledged by Camilla, the woman led the way to a small but neatly furnished parlour down-stairs, where breakfast was ready arranged upon the table.

The woman's husband was there, and his appearance had undergone considerable improvement. For he had shaven the beard of several days' growth which enhanced the sinister expression of his countenance when Camilla first beheld him, a few hours back, his hair, then matted, was now combed out and neatly arranged, his soiled shirt had been exchanged for clean linen, and he wore a decent suit of black clothes.

"I hope my missus has made you comfortable, young lady?" said the man, assuming as gentle a tone as his voice could possibly modulate itself to.

"I have to return you both my sincerest thanks for your kindness," answered Camilla.

"Oh, don't say a word about that, miss," exclaimed the man. "We only performed a Christian duty; and I'm sure that even a heart of stone would have melted to see such a nice young lady as you are in any sort of trouble and distress. Why, when I returned home, about an hour after you and my missus, I found her a-crying as if her eyes had turned into water-spouts —"

"Well, well," interrupted the woman, but not petulantly, "I must confess that I was affected by all the dear young lady had been telling me as we walked along. For it's such a shocking thing to have lost one's parents at so tender an age — But come, dear miss," she exclaimed, suddenly interrupting herself, for she saw that Camilla had become painfully affected; "dry your tears, don't take on so, there's a sweet girl, and anything that me or my husband can do to assist you we will perform cheerfully. Come, sit down, and try a cup of tea; it will do you good, miss."

Camilla hastily wiped her eyes, and, yielding to the woman's entreaties, took a seat at the table. Her heart was, however, too full to allow her to experience the slightest appetite; but she forced herself to eat a mouthful, for fear her entertainers should think that she was dainty and disliked the homely fare set before her. When the meal was over, the man rose from his seat, observing that he had some

particular business to transact in the City, but that he should be back by dinner-time.

"The City!" exclaimed his wife. "Are you going into the City the first thing this morning? Well, that is singular —"

"Singular, my dear, — how so?" demanded the man, who spoke in very affectionate terms to his wife.

"Because this young lady has some little business to transact in the City, I think. Didn't you say so, miss?" inquired the woman, turning toward Camilla.

"I must indeed replenish my purse," responded the orphan, with a profound sigh, "since I have been compelled to leave my situation. Having lost one home, the sooner I settle myself in another the better."

"Then I suppose, miss, that you've got relations, or trustees, or lawyers, or something of the sort in the City," said the man, "and you want to call upon them. In that case, I shall be very happy to see you safe to their house," he added, with an apparent frankness which quite made the orphan forget the sinister expression of his countenance.

"Alas! I have no relatives, no friends," she returned, hastily wiping away the tears that started forth upon her long lashes. "But, oh, I was wrong to say that I had no friends," she exclaimed, a sudden reminiscence striking her and bringing a tint of animation to her pale cheeks. "Yes, Mr. Meagles; he will advise me how to act —"

"You'd better write a note to your friend, miss," said the man, exchanging a rapid but significant glance with the woman; "and I will take it to him at once for you. It'll be much better than for you to go running about the streets —"

"Thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Camilla, grateful for the suggestion and the offer which accompanied it. "But it is not necessary for me to write; indeed, my brain is so bewildered that my very sight is dazzled, and I could not pen a single line. My object will be, however, accomplished if you will have the goodness to call on Mr. Meagles in Jermyn Street," and she mentioned the number of Mrs. Piggleberry's house. "You can tell him that incidents of a most unpleasant nature have occurred, compelling me to leave the establishment in which I held a situation, and that if he will favour me with an immediate visit, his advice will be most thankfully received."

"Your commission, miss, shall be executed without a

moment's unnecessary delay," responded the man, who immediately quitted the house.

Ten minutes elapsed before it struck Camilla that she had forgotten to communicate her name to the individual who had thus undertaken to convey her message to Meagles; and she almost felt surprised and annoyed that the man himself had not asked the question. She, however, consoled herself with the reflection that Meagles would be certain to guess who it was that thus sent for him, and if not, the description which the messenger would give of her personal appearance could not fail to recall her to his recollection.

At the expiration of an hour the man returned, wearing a mournful expression of countenance; and Camilla instantly perceived that something was wrong.

"Mr. Meagles isn't at home, miss," he said; "and I regret to inform you that he won't return for the next six weeks. He's gone to Scotland, it appears, on very particular business, for the Prince of Wales, I think the woman of the house told me."

"Yes, most probably," murmured poor Camilla, in a stifling tone. "I know that he is very frequently employed in transacting the business of his Royal Highness."

"Well, cheer up, miss; don't take on about it," said the man. "You're quite welcome to stay here, you know, till your friend returns; and as for money, I'm sure neither me or my missus will ever ask you for a farthing."

"The young lady is not without funds," observed the woman, as if giving a piece of information to her husband.

"Oh, well, I'm glad of that, for her sake, poor dear!" exclaimed the latter. "But how could I know it unless you told me, my love?" he added, in a tone of bland and gentle remonstrance to his wife.

"My good friends," suddenly exclaimed Camilla, after a few moments' deep thought, "my mind is made up how to act. It is true that I possess a few hundreds of pounds in the Bank of England, which sum I had hoped to leave there to accumulate while I subsisted by the earnings of my needle. I am determined not to seek for another situation; but I will hire and furnish a neat lodging in a respectable neighbourhood and endeavour to form a connection as a dress-maker. For this purpose I propose to repair to the City, inquire for some respectable solicitor or stock-broker —"

"If you want a lawyer, miss," interrupted the woman, "my husband's attorney is one in whom you can place implicit trust. Ah! we were better off ourselves once, miss, I can assure you, and then we had our regular professional adviser, who has stuck like a friend to us ever since."

"He has indeed!" ejaculated the man. "There isn't a better fellow in the world than Samuel Simmonds, Esquire, though I say it. And what is more extraordinary still, I've got an appointment with him this forenoon."

"I shall be thankful," said Camilla, "if you will allow me to accompany you to Mr. Simmonds's office."

"Well, I have got to call at several places first," remarked the man; "but my missus shall go with you into the City presently, and I'll meet you both in Tokenhouse Yard at twelve o'clock precisely."

With this understanding, to which the orphan thankfully assented, he took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ORPHAN'S FRIENDS

PRECISELY as the clock of the Royal Exchange was striking midday, Camilla Morton and the woman alighted from a hackney-coach in Lothbury, whence they passed into Tokenhouse Yard, which is a blind alley the houses whereof are chiefly let out as offices and business premises.

With the little money which Camilla had in her possession when she fled from Mrs. Brace's house on the preceding night, she had purchased a bonnet and scarf; and the excitement of having her mind now actively employed had brought back the colour to her cheeks. Her appearance was therefore ladylike, pleasing, and interesting, and, as the woman kept close behind her, it seemed as if a genteel young person was walking out attended by her servant.

Scarcely had they entered Tokenhouse Yard when the woman exclaimed, "How fortunate! Here's comes my husband with the lawyer."

And Camilla, raising her eyes, beheld the man advancing in company with a short, stout, red-faced, but respectable-looking individual, dressed in black, and who was immediately introduced to Miss Morton as Mr. Samuel Simmonds.

"Highly honoured to make your acquaintance, miss," said the attorney. "What can I do for you in the way of business? But had we not better walk back to my offices?" he demanded, glancing over his shoulder in the direction of the farther extremity of Tokenhouse Yard.

"I don't think it's necessary, sir," suggested the man. "This young lady only wants to sell out a few pounds —"

"Indeed! Oh, well, it happens that I am just going over to the bank to meet my broker, who is to sell out twenty

thousand for a certain noble lord, my best client, in fact," observed Mr. Samuel Simmonds, assuming a confidential tone and air, as if he would not tell everybody that the nameless peer was his most generous patron. "Well, miss, and how much do you propose to sell out, and what's the stock? Be so kind as to tell me all about it, miss, and your business shall be done in a jiffy — ahem! I mean in a moment."

Camilla, taking the abruptness of the lawyer's manner for the offhandedness of business, drew from the bosom of her dress a bank receipt; and presenting it to the attorney, she said, "This will give you all the necessary explanations, sir; and I am desirous to sell out a hundred pounds."

"Very well, miss, a hundred pounds," repeated Mr. Samuel Simmonds. "Just be so kind as to step over to the bank with me. Oh, you may come too, both of you, if you like," he added, turning with a patronizing smile to the man and his wife.

The whole party accordingly crossed over the street to the bank, and entered that courtyard which communicates with Lothbury.

"Stop here one moment, miss; stop here with the young lady, my good friends," said Mr. Samuel Simmonds, in his offhand, bustling, businesslike style. "I must just step in and see whether my broker is there yet; or else," he observed, with a knowing wink, "non-professionals, you perceive, will not be allowed to enter this atmosphere which is redolent of cash."

And laughing heartily at some wit which he probably saw in the observation, Mr. Samuel Simmonds walked rapidly away, entering the building by a door at the extremity of the court, and carrying the bank receipt in his hand with an air of as much indifference to its value as if it were a piece of waste paper as utterly worthless, for instance, as the leaf of the *Morning Post* that contains the leading articles.

"Clever fellow, that, very clever fellow!" observed the man, ostensibly addressing himself to his wife, but really for the purpose of impressing the idea which he enunciated on the mind of Miss Morton.

A feeling of uneasiness shot like a pang through the brain of the young lady when she beheld the lawyer depart in such an unceremonious manner with the document which constituted her title to the few hundred pounds that she had in

the funds; but scarcely had she begun to reason within herself against the justice of her suspicion, when Mr. Simmonds reappeared, holding the bank receipt in his hand with the same air as before, as if it were a matter of perfect indifference whether he or his client kept it until it was wanted.

"My broker isn't come yet, and it's just as well that he should not have been here at the moment," said Mr. Samuel Simmonds, as he accosted the party. "The fact is, I find there's a new regulation issued since yesterday, and people selling out stock must be identified to the broker at his office first. So I tell you what must be done: you, my good fellow," he continued, addressing himself to the man, "go with the young lady to my broker's, — you know where he lives in Cateaton Street, — and having identified her, make him come along with you at once. Tell him I'm waiting here about his lordship's twenty thousand pound affair, as well as the young lady's business. Miss," he added, turning to Camilla, "will you have the goodness to step as far as Cateaton Street with our good friend here, and then the matter can be settled in a moment."

Camilla unhesitatingly complied with this request; and away she went in company with the man whose sinister countenance she had completely forgotten, so grateful did she feel toward him for all the trouble himself and his wife were taking in her behalf.

On emerging from the Bank of England, however, Camilla observed that her companion drew his hat, which had large slouching brims, very far over his countenance, and pulled the great shawl-handkerchief which he wore very high up; and as the weather was not particularly cold, the proceeding actually assumed in her eyes the appearance of a wish on the man's part to conceal his features. Again did suspicion shoot like a pang through the brain of the orphan; and the feeling was sympathetically felt like an ice-bolt in her heart. She cast another and more scrutinizing look upon his countenance; but all she could see of it were the eyes that gleamed with a sinister glare, and the nose peering over the shawl-handkerchief. Thus was he muffled up, and yet it was little more than noon, in the broad daylight, and with a crisp and healthy but by no means chilling atmosphere.

What could it mean? Had she fallen into vile hands? Should she rush back to the Bank of England, where she had

left the woman and the lawyer, and demand her receipt, or at least assure herself that it was all safe? Her blood literally curdled in her veins and she appeared to be walking on under the influence of a vertigo as she asked herself these questions. Still she obeyed not the suggestive impulse which her suspicions gave; and although every instant beheld those suspicions growing more poignant and intolerable, she had not the moral courage nor the resolution to turn abruptly and retrace her way to the Bank of England, because by so doing she should at once be letting the man see that she mistrusted him, his wife, and his attorney altogether. And then, if her suspicions did happen to be wrong, how sorry, how grieved, how distressed should she be to think that she had thus injuriously treated persons at whose hands she had received so much kindness!

While these conflicting thoughts, ideas, and inclinations swayed her mind, she still kept walking on by the side of the man; and at length, unable any longer to endure a state of suspense and uncertainty which became excruciating, she said, "I beg your pardon for putting such a question, but are you confident that Mr. Simmonds is completely trustworthy?"

"Trustworthy!" ejaculated the man, speaking from behind the great shawl-handkerchief; "to be sure he is, miss, or you don't suppose that I would have recommended him to you? Bless your heart alive, he's honesty itself!"

They were now in Cateaton Street, which is a very narrow thoroughfare; and at this moment a wagon so completely blocked up the way that there was only room for one person to pass at a time. The man allowed Camilla to proceed first; and the young lady went quickly on, in the hope of speedily reaching the stock-broker's office.

The wagon was cleared, and, turning around, she looked for her companion. But he was not to be seen. Her suspicions now became maddening, and she hurriedly retraced her way along the street. Still she could see nothing of him. With wild and affrighted looks, the orphan increased her pace, and in a few minutes arrived once more at the Bank of England.

Entering the court opening from Lothbury, a glance convinced her that the woman and the attorney had disappeared likewise. A sickening sensation came over the poor

girl, her brain reeled, her eyes grew dim, her limbs gave way beneath her. But by a sudden and violent effort, she recalled her scattered ideas; and remembering that the lawyer's offices were represented to be situate in Tokenhouse Yard, she hastened thither with a speed which was now animated by despair. On every door and on the wall inside every passage opening from that blind alley did she search for the name of Simmonds; but she found it not. At length, when the last house in the place was vainly inspected, the orphan staggered against a door-post and pressed her hand to her forehead in order to steady her brain, for she felt as if she were going mad.

But once more did she arouse herself from the influence of despair in order to woo back hope to her bosom; for, oh, to lose all that she possessed in the world was a blow which seemed of an atrocity too infernal for a good God to permit to fall upon the head of an orphan, — a blow which would strike her as with blasting, searing lightning, leaving nought save the blackest misery in her soul.

Holding her hand in momentary consideration to her heated, throbbing brow, she reflected that she might have misunderstood Mr. Simmonds, that his offices were not in Tokenhouse Yard, that he was perhaps still waiting for her, but in some other part of the Bank of England, and that an accident had separated her from the man who was leading her to the broker's place of business. These thoughts, rapidly suggesting themselves, appeared so feasible that she even endeavoured to smile at her own silliness in giving way to such harrowing suspicions; but, alas! the smile was sickly indeed, and the suspicions were relieved of little of their agonizing poignancy.

Hastening back to the Bank of England, Camilla accosted the beadle who stood at the gate, and inquired whether he happened to be acquainted with an attorney of the name of Simmonds.

"I should rayther think you don't want to ax me such a quèstion, young o'oman," was the gruff response which the lace-bedizened functionary gave, as he raised his staff slowly and let it fall suddenly with the butt-end on the pavement.

"You surely cannot understand my question," said Camilla, the tears starting into her eyes, "or you would

at least answer me with the same civility that I exhibited toward you when putting it," she added, in a tone that trembled with emotions.

"All I know is that I see you and another o'man pass the gate just now in company with that notorious feller Simmonds and a suspicious-looking man, and I kept a precious sharp eye on all four on yer," said the beadle. "So you'd better be off, 'cos we don't want pickpockets and prostitutes lurking about here — But, holloa! what's the matter now?" he ejaculated, perceiving that Camilla suddenly burst into a perfect agony of weeping. "Come, tramp, be off with you!" he cried, in a brutal tone and with savage manner. "This is a new dodge, I suppose, and you fancy that whimpering vill make genelmen pull out their purses and empty 'em into yer hand. Come, be off, I say."

And, seizing the wretched girl by the shoulders as she was leaning against the open door to support herself from falling, the beadle bundled her roughly into the street.

Three or four persons instantly stopped to witness the proceeding; and Camilla, overwhelmed with mingled shame and grief, fruitlessly endeavoured to utter a few words of explanation. The beadle made a sign that she was an impostress, the persons whom the scene had attracted shook their heads and passed on, wondering how so young a creature could practise so much deception, and the bank functionary of course obtained the credit of being a very vigilant and experienced officer who could detect a rogue or cheat under any disguise.

And the orphan dragged herself away from the spot, ten thousand times more poignantly wounded by the insult she had received than by the loss of all she possessed in the world; for that Simmonds was a notorious character was at least apparent from the words which had fallen from the beadle's lips.

For a few minutes the mental anguish which Camilla endured was so excruciating that it absorbed every other consideration; but suddenly recollecting that she was in a public place in the middle of a crowded city, and perceiving that her woebegone aspect was attracting toward her the notice of every one who passed, she dried her eyes, drew her veil over her countenance, and walked mechanically on, without, however, heeding which way she was going. In this

mood the poor creature made the complete circuit of the bank; and she only became aware of the fact when suddenly startled by finding herself once more within a few yards of the beadle who had ere now so grossly ill-treated her.

Retaining her veil over her countenance, and summoning all her courage to her aid, she accosted the man, who evidently did not recognize her again at the moment.

"Not many minutes have elapsed," she said, in a tone the collected firmness of which surprised even herself, "since you cruelly misjudged the character of a respectable young lady, to whom you likewise offered personal violence."

"Ah! and you're the young lady?" ejaculated the beadle, suddenly becoming alarmed lest he had indeed gone too far, for there was now something in her voice and manner which carried a conviction to the man's heart that she was not the loose and abandoned character he had so gratuitously represented her to be.

"Yes, I am the young lady," said Camilla, "and if you yourself are a father or a brother, if you have a sister or a grown-up daughter whom you love and respect, you ought to feel both sorry and ashamed that you have this day so grossly and unprovokedly insulted me."

The beadle now grew more frightened, and began to stammer forth apologies, declaring that there were so many impostors nowadays it was impossible to know who was honest and who was not, that the bank especially was made the scene and the theatre of their pranks, and that he was obliged to be very particular or else he should lose his situation.

"All this is doubtless true enough," said Camilla, "but you ought to exercise greater caution. However, I freely forgive you for the ill-treatment which I experienced at your hands. And now tell me what you know of those people with whom you saw me ere now?"

"Respecting the young o'man and the man with the shawl-handkerchief, I don't know nothink, miss," answered the beadle, whose tone and manner had changed from the surly roughness of the bully to the cringing servility of a coward who is afraid of the consequences of his ruffianism; "leastways, I could only judge by their looks that they was rum customers. But that scoundrel Simmonds is always lurking about here —"

"Then he is not an attorney, as he pretends?" said Camilla, her heart sinking within her and all the keen, agonizing consciousness of utter misery again coming upon her, as the last lingering gleam of hope was now unmistakably destroyed.

"Well, he was a lawyer once, miss," answered the beadle; "but he's been struck off the rolls long ago, and ever since he's hung about the bank and 'change —"

"Which is the way into the public-room where persons sell money out of the funds?" demanded Camilla, in a stifling voice.

"Through that door, miss," responded the functionary, pointing with his staff in the direction indicated by his words.

Away sped the orphan into the establishment; and addressing herself to one of the numerous clerks whom she saw in the room that she thus entered, she put a few inquiries in a rapid and almost incoherent manner, for she was convulsed with an inward grief to which she dared not give vent, but which it cost her the most painful efforts to control. By the individual whom she thus accosted, Camilla was referred to another clerk; and from the lips of this latter official she learned that certain stock standing in a certain name had been sold out within the last half-hour. The book was shown her, her name, as it appeared in the bank certificate, had been signed by the female who personated her, and that female could have been none other than the treacherous woman who had treated her with such a show of hospitality and friendship.

For a few moments a palsy of the heart and brain seized upon the wretched girl, and a mortal shivering assailed her. Her limbs gave way beneath her, and she clung to the counter for support.

"A forgery has been committed, then?" said the clerk; and the words, which he repeated for the third time, fell upon her ears and recalled her to her senses.

"A forgery — yes — and I am ruined!" she gasped painfully; then, as a sudden idea struck her, she fled precipitately from the room.

But the clerk hurried after her, and, overtaking the wretched girl as she was speeding through the courtyard, he said, "I beg your pardon, miss, but so serious an affair must be looked into immediately."

"I am going somewhere for that purpose," replied the orphan, in a rapid and excited tone.

"You will return then; you will assist the officers of justice, if necessary, in adopting the proper proceedings."

"Yes, yes, I will return," exclaimed Camilla, the dread of seeing a last hope destroyed now rendering her even angrily impatient and petulant.

And, breaking abruptly away from the clerk, she sped forth from the Bank of England.

A hackney-coach was passing at the time; she stopped it, entered the vehicle, and ordered the driver to take her to Westminster, and set her down in the immediate vicinity of the abbey.

The ride, instead of serving as an interval for her to regain her composure, only tended to increase the excitement under which she laboured. For her impatience became agonizing; she longed to repair to the house where she had slept, in the hope of encountering the woman, and either by threats or entreaties inducing her to surrender a part, if not the whole, of the amount which she had received at the bank. But the coach was drawn by two miserable hacks which crept along at a snail's pace; and, to add to her vexation, Cheapside was thronged with vehicles. Thus was her progress impeded, and all the while her own ideas travelled with the speed of lightning. For she fancied that the man and woman who, under the guise of friendship, had so scandalously plundered her, would have time to return to their abode, pack up their things, and decamp ere she could possibly reach the place. Her impatience, therefore, grew maddening; and on reaching the abbey she was in such a state of exhaustion, through the intense workings of her feelings, that she could not immediately alight from the vehicle.

Three times did the coachman inform her, as he stood holding the door wide open, that she had reached her destination, three times before she could rightly understand him. Then, suddenly reanimated with courage, strength, and energy, she sprang forth and was darting away, when the driver demanded his fare. Her reply was that she should return in a few moments; but her wild and excited manner rendered him suspicious, and he insisted upon being paid at once. Though burning with anxiety to rush onward, Camilla was compelled to yield; and the liquidation of the coach-

man's claim exhausted the contents of her purse. She was now penniless.

But not pausing to reflect upon this circumstance, nor even heeding the driver's question whether he was to wait for her, the almost maddened girl plunged into that maze of streets in which she knew the house where she had slept was situated. To find this dwelling was not, however, so easy a task as she had at first anticipated. For the streets in low, obscure, and vile neighbourhoods are so much alike, and squalor, vice, and misery assimilate all things which come within their fatal scope. Thus, having chased frantically up and down in that labyrinth of poor habitations, Camilla was compelled to relax her pace; and it was when, completely exhausted, she was dragging herself painfully along, scrutinizing every door and every house front, that she lighted on the abode which she sought.

A gleam of joy flashed through the black and cheerless void into which the wretchedness of a few hours had changed her heart; and she knocked hastily at the door.

The summons was obeyed by a hideous-looking man on whose bald head an excrescence or wen protruded with a disgusting effect, and on every lineament of whose countenance crime was stamped indelibly.

"Are the people of the house at home?" inquired Camilla, timidly, for her heart again sank completely within her at the appearance of so repulsive an individual.

"Who d'ye mean?" demanded the fellow, with a tone and manner that were not only brutal but even menacing.

"I mean the man and his wife who gave me a lodging here last night," responded the young girl. "I do not know their names."

"Lord bless ye!" ejaculated the repulsive individual, "you'll never hear of them no more. They're gone for good, young miss, I can tell you."

And with these words, which sounded the knell of the orphan's last hope, the fellow banged the door violently in her face.

She turned away, that poor friendless girl, as if she had just heard her death-sentence pronounced. Her countenance was so ghastly pale it seemed as if the blood could almost be perceived in the blue veins, her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, her throat was as dry as if she had swallowed

ashes. Great God! what was to become of her? Whither was she to go? Where seek an asylum? Not at Mrs. Brace's fashionable establishment, which the vices of the aristocratic and the profligacy of the great and titled had converted into a luxurious brothel discreetly conducted, — oh, no, not for worlds would she return thither! Death, death, ay, even death by starvation, death in the open street, on the cold pavement, yes, such a death were preferable to the loss of her honour.

Alas! alas! poor orphan girl, deeply, deeply do we sympathize with thee, boundless is our compassion, O persecuted virgin!

But whither does she now fly so quickly? What new idea has seized upon her imagination? What sudden impulse is she obeying thus precipitately? She remembers that there is such a person in the world as Meagles. She is hastening to Jermyn Street to ascertain whether it be really true that he has undertaken a journey to Scotland. For this purpose is she speeding on so frantically again. 'Tis her only hope, and her ardent longing to find it realized lends wings to her feet.

But a sudden vertigo seizes upon her, she stops short, her brain reels, she staggers forward a few paces, extending her arms as if to implore assistance, then sinks upon a door-step in that vile neighbourhood near the abbey.

A moan of indescribable anguish escapes her lips, and her senses abandon her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MRS. FITZHERBERT AND TIM MEAGLES

IN the splendidly furnished drawing-room belonging to her own suite of apartments at Carlton House Mrs. Fitzherbert was seated alone, in a pensive mood, upon a sofa placed near the fire which burned in the grate as if with a cheerfulness that mocked her mournful aspect.

Not only was she indignant and offended on account of the scene which had occurred on the night of the ball; but there was likewise a presentiment of approaching evil weighing heavily upon her heart. For though this was by no means the only quarrel which she had ever experienced with the Prince of Wales, it was nevertheless the first that had lasted so long and that had led to no attempt at reconciliation on his part.

What could this perseverance in maintaining a state of enmity mean? What did it signify? Had her charms lost their spells, her witcheries their power, her manners their fascination? Or was his Royal Highness in reality so deeply attached to Lady Desborough that he not only pined on account of the disappointment he had experienced, but likewise cherished an unforgiving rancour against her who had thus interposed between himself and the intended victim of his lust?

The untoward incident had taken place on Monday night; it was now Thursday afternoon, and the prince had not even sent to inquire concerning her health. Two mortal days had thus passed, a third was drawing to its close, and not a word nor a line from him who before God was her husband, though the detestable laws made by man forbade the connection. At first the lady's indignation and resentment sustained on her own side a feeling which would have made her decline

any answer to a verbal message and send back a written one unopened; then, as her more angry sentiments gave way to the fondness which she really experienced for the prince, her pride prompted her to shroud herself in a reserve as gloomy as that in which he had shut himself up, and thus from neither side had emanated the least overture toward a reconciliation. Though living beneath the same roof, this husband and wife had not seen each other for three whole days.

Now, therefore, the lady's pride was more than ever wounded; and indignation was again asserting its empire in her breast. How haughty was now that curl on her exquisitely chiseled lip! How menacing was the light which shone in her large blue eyes! How nervously did her taper fingers play with the long, pale, glossy tresses which flowed down upon her plump shoulders of dazzling whiteness and the bosom of such luxurious proportions.

Should she await the royal pleasure of her husband to make up their serious differences, or should she pen a line conveying the first overture to him?

These were the questions which she asked herself in a moment of milder mood; and she was deliberating the points within her own breast when a servant threw open the door of the apartment, announcing Mr. Meagles.

A glow of triumph and the animation of joy lighted up the splendid features of Mrs. Fitzherbert as she rose to receive the guest; for it instantly struck her that he was come as a messenger of peace from his Royal Highness.

Meagles, who was attired in a suit of black, but whose coat, nevertheless, had a certain sporting cut about it, endeavoured to assume a demureness of countenance which he deemed suitable to the task which he had taken in hand; and indeed, he did feel dissatisfied and low-spirited concerning it, for, much as he really disliked Mrs. Fitzherbert, he could not resist the painful reflection, now when matters were coming to a point, that it was a woman against whom he was about to wage war. Even at the last moment would he have gladly retreated from any further interference in the business; but interest, — self-interest, — egotism, these prevailed with a man who was far from being deficient in qualities naturally generous and traits unquestionably amiable.

With a greater courtesy than she had ever before manifested toward him did Mrs. Fitzherbert proffer her hand to Mr. Meagles and request him to be seated; then, with the tact of that good breeding which affected to see in him only an ordinary visitor and not a messenger sent on a special errand, she began to converse on the current topics of the day with as much graceful ease and unpretending fluency as if she had nought weighing on her mind.

Meagles was far more embarrassed than he thought he should be. Mrs. Fitzherbert's cordiality of manner disarmed him of the rancour which he had cherished against her; and her extreme beauty touched his heart, enlisting his sympathies in spite of himself. He adored the fair sex, and it struck him as being something criminal to plunge into the deepest woe the superb creature whose eyes were now beaming kindly and whose lips were smiling upon him.

But he thought of the dukedom which he hoped to gain eventually, and once more did egotism triumph.

Averting his head partially, so that the lady's artillery of charms and fascinations should not play with such powerful effect upon his looks, he availed himself of a momentary pause in the discourse to observe, "Madam — your Royal Highness — I know not exactly which to call you —"

"Ah! then, at all events, you are no stranger to the secret of my marriage with the Prince of Wales?" interrupted Mrs. Fitzherbert, with a smile that displayed the brilliant teeth between the parting coral of the lips.

"His Royal Highness keeps few secrets from me, madam," said Meagles, catching a glimpse of the handsome countenance as it appeared, handsomer than ever, when the light of so sweet a smile played upon it. Then, again averting his eyes, he added, "Yes, madam, I am aware that the marriage ceremony was celebrated between yourself and his Royal Highness —"

"And I presume and hope that the prince speaks of it with respect?" exclaimed the lady, suddenly alarmed by the peculiarity which was apparent in the tone and manner of Tim Meagles as he made the observation which she thus interrupted.

"Oh, his Royal Highness entertains the utmost respect toward you, madam," responded Meagles, not daring to look at her as he thus spoke; "and whatever may happen, he will

ever adopt measures to ensure your happiness and prosperity."

"Whatever may happen?" repeated Mrs. Fitzherbert, with increasing alarm, a terror that she vainly endeavoured to conceal; for it was apparent in the half-excited, half-tremulous tone in which she gave utterance to those words.

"And I am sure, madam," continued Meagles, "that no one can regret more deeply, more profoundly, more bitterly than his Royal Highness the necessity which compels him to yield obedience to his august father's will."

"I begin to understand you, sir," murmured the lady, in a faint voice. Then subduing her emotions with a great though painful effort, she said, "Tell me candidly, Mr. Meagles, has the prince sent you to me on this occasion?"

And she laid her hand gently on his arm as she spoke, as if appealing in a friendly spirit to his honour and his generosity to treat her with frankness and candour.

"It is by the desire of his Royal Highness that I have sought this interview," replied Meagles, who was compelled to look Mrs. Fitzherbert in the face as he thus answered her query; and the anxiety which he saw depicted there, in spite of her strenuous endeavours to veil her feelings, did him harm.

"You are a messenger from his Royal Highness, and the bearer of evil tidings, Mr. Meagles," said the lady, after a few moments' pause. "But tell me all that the prince has commanded you to communicate. Keep me not in suspense, Mr. Meagles, I implore you."

"Madam," resumed the individual thus energetically appealed to, "I beseech you to prepare yourself to hear intelligence which will no doubt distress you. But the prince relies upon that attachment which you experience for him, that love which you bear him —"

"Then assuredly the tidings which you are about to impart are more serious than I could have possibly anticipated," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, her courage and presence of mind rapidly oozing away; "for it is evident that the prince has well instructed you how to gild your prefatory words and administer a little honey to mitigate the after bitterness of a vast amount of gall. Oh, Mr. Meagles, if you have any compassion for me, you will at once and without

further delay tell me what his Royal Highness proposes, wishes, or commands."

"The prince is forced, madam," replied Meagles, "to give his assent to this alliance which has been planned for him —"

"With Caroline of Brunswick!" ejaculated the lady, a visible trembling passing over her magnificent form; and, while the blood rushed to her countenance, dyeing her cheeks with a crimson hue, that made them appear in strong contrast with the pale colour of her shining hair, she bit her lip convulsively in order to restrain an outburst of those feelings which suddenly began to boil within her.

"Yes, with Caroline of Brunswick, madam," repeated Meagles. "No one is better acquainted than yourself with the peculiar position in which the Prince of Wales is placed. His debts are enormous, and the only way of inducing the House of Commons, servile and grovelling as it is toward the royal family, to vote the funds to liquidate those liabilities, is by offering the marriage of his Royal Highness as a guarantee for his future steadiness."

"His Royal Highness is married, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, rising from her seat and drawing herself up so proudly and with an air of such queenly hauteur that Meagles was for a few minutes completely overawed. "Yes," continued the lady, in a tone well suited to the feminine dignity of her manner and the loftiness of her bearing, "the Prince of Wales is married, and I am his wife. I know it may be objected that there is in existence a certain law entitled the Royal Marriage Act, which was passed twenty-three years ago, and in contravention of which I have become the wife of his Royal Highness. I am aware, therefore, that the detestable technicalities of law courts may pronounce our alliance illegal, and a vile statute may be made to triumph even over the ordinances of God. But such a monstrous proceeding shall not be allowed to take its course without resistance, ay, a bitter resistance on my part. For marriage is a tie which cannot be trifled with, unless indeed Parliaments shall at once proclaim themselves an authority superior to God and God's ordinances, and declare that they are justified in repealing all the beneficent provisions of the Christian Church in order to suit the whims and pander to the caprices of royalty. No, Mr. Meagles, the prince shall

not divorce me thus. I love him enough to die for him, but not sufficiently to permit myself to be made the sport of his pleasure and the victim of his convenience; for death were preferable to such an insult."

And having thus spoken, Mrs. Fitzherbert sank down exhausted upon her seat.

"Madam," said Meagles, in a deep and solemn tone, "I have listened to you with the utmost attention, and I perfectly agree with you in all the opinions which you have enunciated. For I admit the infamy, the scandal, and the atrocity of the Royal Marriage Act, which suspends in respect to a single family those laws which apply to the millions forming the rest of the community. But allow me to remind you that the English monarchy is in reality as despotic and as absolute as that of Russia, with only this exception, that whereas the Russian sovereign promulgates his will all at once in the shape of an ukase, the English sovereign establishes his tyranny through the medium of a servile Parliament. Nevertheless, madam, it is as easy for the king of England as for the emperor of Russia to perpetrate a foul wrong; the way in which it is done is alone different."

"And what would you have me infer from all this, Mr. Meagles?" demanded Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a cold tone; for her excitement had subsided into a glacial aspect of stern determination.

"I would have you understand, madam, that it is utterly useless for you to oppose the will of the British sovereign," responded Meagles. "He is resolved that the heir apparent shall marry the Princess of Brunswick, and this self-same heir apparent dares not disobey him. Under these circumstances, madam, it will be worse than useless for you to throw any objection in the way; for the king's fiat has gone forth, and the prince has made up his mind to yield with as good a grace as he can well assume."

"And I am to be sacrificed, Mr. Meagles?" said the lady, in a tone so cold and passionless that it seemed as if a marble statue were speaking, and as a marble statue, too, was she now pale and motionless and still, all save those white lips between which her words came slowly and freezingly.

"Madam, you will not, I hope, indulge in harsh terms," exclaimed Meagles "for all the severity of expression which

the English language is capable of conveying will not amend the position of affairs. But if you compel me to unfold the truth in all its naked plainness, I must candidly and frankly inform you that King George III would not only sacrifice one poor weak woman, but would see a hundred thousand beautiful female hearts bursting and breaking ere he would yield a single tittle of his purpose. This is the solemn fact, madam, and with pain and grief is it that I give you so hopeless an assurance. But rememehr, as yet the king is unacquainted with the fact that a marriage ceremony was ever performed between yourself and his son — ”

“ Our interview need not be prolonged, Mr. Meagles,” said Mrs. Fitzherbert, slowly rising from her seat.

“ It cannot be concluded, madam, until something definite be settled,” he answered, not rudely but firmly.

“ Am I to understand that you await a reply from my lips, in order to convey it to his Royal Highness? ” demanded the lady, fixing her eyes keenly upon his countenance.

“ Madam, the affair is no longer in the hands of the Prince of Wales,” said Meagles, solemnly and impressively.

“ Then, in whose charge is it? ” asked Mrs. Fitzherbert.

“ In mine,” rejoined Meagles.

“ Ah! ” ejaculated the lady, a flush reappearing on her cheeks and dying away again as suddenly; “ then I am to understand that I behold in you an enemy? ”

“ God forbid that you should force me into an act of hostility! ” exclaimed Meagles.

“ Nevertheless, your words prove that, under particular circumstances, you are prepared to act on the offensive,” said Mrs. Fitzherbert, her eyelids, her lips, and her bosom now evincing a nervous trepidation which showed that her glacial sternness of purpose was changing into excitement and agitation once more.

“ To put as speedy an end as possible to this most painful interview,” observed Meagles, “ permit me to inform you that you must expect to behold his Royal Highness no more, otherwise than as a friend.”

“ And if I resist this cruel decision, if I proclaim open hostility to this tyrannous conduct, if I assert my rights — ” gasped the unhappy lady, throwing a look of mingled entreaty, apprehension, and suspense on Meagles as he stood before her with half-averted countenance.

"Oh, madam!" he exclaimed, in a tone which showed that his heart was not callous to all the pathos of this singular but touching scene, "compel me not to give utterance to menaces, force me not to speak in an unmanly way toward you."

"Nay, I will not be thus easily crushed, thus readily subdued," ejaculated the lady, in a moment recovering her presence of mind and the energy of her character. "I know that you are capable of anything desperate, Mr. Meagles, but I defy your threats."

"And yet you must suspect, madam," he said, in a tone full of meaning, "that I am acquainted with a secret concerning yourself, a secret involving your honour, madam — Ah! that telltale blush shows that I am not misunderstood —"

"But the Marquis de Bellois would not be villain enough to proclaim in his sober moments what he has doubtless boasted of to you, sir, in his wine-cups," interrupted Mrs. Fitzherbert, the colour coming and going with rapid alternations upon her countenance, and her whole frame trembling with concentrated rage.

"I require not the Marquis de Bellois's words to corroborate the tale which it is in my power to tell," said Tim Meagles, forcing himself thus to give utterance to threats of which he was profoundly ashamed.

"Ah! then you fancy that the honour of a woman can be sullied beyond all redemption by the mere fact of your breathing upon it?" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a tone of the bitterest scorn.

"Madam, you do wrong to provoke me," answered Meagles; "but the sooner you understand me fully, the better. Know, then, that you must yield to circumstances."

"Begone, sir! begone!" cried the lady, interrupting Meagles with sovereign imperiousness, and pointing toward the door.

"One word, madam, one word —"

"Not a syllable, unless it be to demand my pardon for an insolence which has already lasted much too long. Begone!" repeated the indignant lady, "or I will order my valets to thrust you ignominiously forth into the street."

"Then learn the truth at last, madam!" cried Meagles,

his face becoming purple; and drawing forth a packet of papers, he held it significantly up before her eyes.

One glance, one single glance was sufficient to convince the startled and wretched lady that the damning proofs of her amour with the Marquis de Bellois were in the hands of her enemies, and, reeling half-around, she sank heavily, like a dead weight, upon a sofa.

Still she retained her senses, oh, retained them most keenly, most acutely; for it appeared as if lightnings had suddenly blasted all her hopes, as if the powers of hell clasped her limbs; and, a cold perspiration breaking out all over her, she was drenched in her own excruciating agony.

"Madam, pardon me, in the name of God, pardon me, for doing all this," exclaimed Meagles, terrified by the appearance of the unhappy lady; "but I am the creature of circumstances —"

"No, sir, no, the creature of your own diabolical selfishness!" cried Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a rending tone. "You are persecuting me that you may gain a reward; but sooner or later Heaven will punish you for the part you have this day taken against me. Tell me, however, tell me," she said, her manner suddenly becoming subdued and her voice sinking, "does he, the prince, does he know that you possess those papers?"

"As God is a witness to my words, the secret itself, your secret, is unknown and unsuspected by his Royal Highness," exclaimed Meagles.

"And it will remain so, provided that I obey the conditions which you dictate?" she demanded, in a hoarse, thick tone. Then, without waiting for a reply, she added, "Had I been left to contend only with the prince, whom I still look upon and claim as a husband, I would not have yielded — oh, no, never, never! Nor should all the power which the king might exercise, when informed of the position wherein I stand with regard to his son, have induced me to disavow my marriage or place a seal on my lips respecting it. To the nation would I have appealed, to the country would I have addressed myself. But since you, sir, have declared yourself the prince's champion in the perpetration of this tremendous wrong, I am forced to submit; for I know," she exclaimed, her eyes glaring wildly, even savagely upon him, "I know that you would not scruple to coerce me by the means which

a villain's treachery has placed in your hands. And now, sir," she demanded, after a few instants' pause, "what are your orders?"

"The conditions I propose, madam, are that you leave Carlton House as soon as convenient," said Meagles, not daring to look her in the face; "and I will guarantee that a handsome provision shall be made for you by his Royal Highness."

"Not a shilling, sir, not a single shilling!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzherbert, summoning all the dignity and hauteur of her character to her aid; for unless she were thus sustained in a condition of unnatural calmness, she felt that her heart would burst. "And now, sir," she said, in a tone which was so cold and with a manner which was so glacial that it froze the blood in Meagles's veins, "you may return to your royal master, the Prince of Wales. Tell him that you have done his behest, that you have succeeded in inducing me to say farewell for ever to this abode in which I have passed some happy hours, and that I do not seek even a moment's interview with him ere I cross this threshold, never to return. Go, sir, and in less than an hour Mrs. Fitzherbert will be no longer an inmate of Carlton House."

Thus speaking, she waved her hand imperiously, and Meagles retired with precipitation from the presence of the woman against whom he had suffered himself to be made the instrument of so diabolical a persecution.

Repairing straight to the private apartment in which the Prince of Wales was so anxiously expecting him, Meagles flung himself upon a seat, and, though he uttered not a word, his manner indicated that a very painful scene had taken place, but that it had ended agreeably to the wishes of the heir apparent.

"I can read success in your countenance, Tim," said his Royal Highness; "but why are you also so infernally mournful?"

"Because I have this day played a part of which I am ashamed," was the emphatic response. "And yet there was no help for it; the step was rendered imperiously necessary by a variety of circumstances —"

"To be sure, to be sure!" ejaculated the prince, interrupting his friend, who was falling into a musing humour; "there was no help for it. But what has been done? Will

she go? How have you managed? Does she want to see me?"

"Do you wish to see her?" demanded Meagles, almost savagely.

"Not I, no, I would rather not," returned the prince, fearful that a last interview had been promised. "You do not mean to say that there is to be any leave-taking."

"None, none!" cried Meagles, emphatically. "She will depart within an hour, — unless, indeed, her heart should break."

"Is it possible that she can be so powerfully affected?" exclaimed the heir apparent, feeling a momentary sorrow stealing over him; but instantaneously recovering his hardihood, he said, "Well, Tim, you have indeed performed prodigies. Yesterday with my father, to-day with Mrs. Fitzherbert —"

"And now, if you wish to testify your gratitude," interrupted Meagles, "you will at once cease from talking on the latter subject. I tell you that I am displeased with myself, and I feel cold all over, as if with remorse. Let us change the conversation, then. Come, have you nought to communicate to me, no new amour —"

"By the bye," ejaculated the Prince of Wales, a sudden thought striking him, "I have indeed something to speak to you about. You remember that money-lending fellow, Foster —"

"Who blew his brains out?" cried Meagles, darting a bitterly reproachful glance at his royal companion.

"The same," returned the latter, coolly, and not noticing the peculiarity of Meagles's look at the moment. "Well, did you not know that this same man possessed a daughter, a very beautiful girl?"

"And how came you to know it?" demanded Meagles, turning sharply around toward the prince.

"Egad! I never knew it at all till last night," continued his Royal Highness. "Only conceive the romance of the narrative I am about to unfold to your ears. Mrs. Brace, the dear, delectable, accommodating Mrs. Brace, received within her establishment a certain Camilla Morton, a sweet creature, attired in deep mourning for the recent loss of both her parents. As a matter of course, I determined to possess the charming Camilla."

"Well, go on, go on," exclaimed Meagles, scarcely able to restrain the mingled impatience and indignation which now animated him. "You determined to possess the charming Camilla, you say, and Mrs. Brace doubtless aided you —"

"To be sure; she is devoted to me," returned the prince. "Accordingly, last night I supped with the excellent milliner, and at the proper time I repaired to the young lady's chamber —"

"What! without any previous understanding, agreement, or appointment?" exclaimed Meagles. "Upon my word, you carry your love-conquests by storm," he added, concealing with a forced laugh the bitter vexation which he in reality experienced.

"By Jove! there was no conquest in this instance, but a signal defeat," cried the prince.

"Ha! ha! let us hear all about it," said Meagles, his laugh now suddenly becoming hearty indeed.

"The tale is told in five words," continued his Royal Highness. "Miss Camilla Morton was sitting up, although it was past midnight, and she had not made the least preparation for retiring to rest. The fact is, she was in a pensive mood, and was giving way to mournful reflections. This much I ascertained by peeping through the keyhole of her door; and, unable to restrain my impatience, I burst in upon her reverie. After a short colloquy she appeared to consent to my views and wishes; but it was only a trick on her part to get me out of the room, under the pretence that she could not lay aside her clothing before me. And I was fool enough to believe her."

"Fool indeed!" ejaculated Tim, with another merry laugh, for he now quite enjoyed the prince's narrative. "What happened next?"

"Why, the cunning, daring, adventurous puss tied the sheets, blankets, and drapery together," continued his Royal Highness, "and she lowered herself from a second-floor window down to the pavement of St. James's Square."

"Merciful God!" exclaimed Meagles, terrified by the bare idea of this appalling feat; "what, without experiencing the slightest injury? Impossible!"

"It is so possible, my dear fellow," returned the prince, "that I saw it all with my own eyes. And now for the sequel.

Prior to trusting herself to the rope, she had most likely intended to secure about her person any papers of consequence which she possessed, for the contents of her work-box and drawers were all thrown confusedly out in different directions; and in her hurry she doubtless dropped a letter upon the floor. At all events, I picked one up; and behold! it was directed to Miss Rose Foster, and addressed to the very house in the Edgeware Road where my money-lending Foster used to dwell. The truth flashed to my mind in a moment. Camilla Morton was in mourning for the recent loss of both her parents, — the name must be an assumed one, — and she could be none other than the daughter of those Fosters who perished so lamentably. Such was the conviction which burst upon me; and I candidly confess that I was staggered for the instant. Something like a remorse sprang up in my breast — ”

“ Ay, likely enough,” interrupted Meagles; “ for you must confess that it would not have been an agreeable sequence to the tragedy of the parents had you persecuted the orphan daughter to death.”

“ Are you in earnest, Tim, speaking so seriously? ” cried the heir apparent, in amazement at this display of softness and emotion on his friend’s part.

“ Perhaps I may be,” responded Meagles, dryly. “ But the young lady got clear off, I suppose? ”

“ Oh, in perfect safety,” rejoined the prince. “ The letter which thus made known to me who she really is was only an epistle from some school acquaintance, written several months ago. And now I will tell you what I want you to do, my dear fellow.”

“ What? ” demanded Meagles.

“ To make inquiries who the girl’s relatives and friends are,” returned his Royal Highness, “ and endeavour to trace her out. I am determined that she shall not escape me thus — ”

At this moment Germain entered the room.

“ What do you want? ” demanded the prince, annoyed at being interrupted in the middle of his observations.

“ I am ordered to announce to your Royal Highness that Mrs. Fitzherbert has taken her departure from Carlton House,” and having delivered this message, the valet bowed and withdrew.

"Now, thank God! I am unshackled once more," exclaimed the prince, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"But only for a short time," answered Meagles, rising from his seat. "In a few months you will have to lead the Princess Caroline of Brunswick to the altar."

"And the idea of that marriage weighs upon my soul like a presentiment of evil," rejoined the heir apparent, a deep gloom suddenly spreading itself over his countenance.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE BARGAIN OF CRIME

It was between nine and ten o'clock on the Sunday evening following the incidents just related, and although dark clouds were piled upon the face of heaven, yet were they so broken that the moon shone brightly forth from amidst them, silvering the edges of their sombre masses.

The Magsman, with his club under his arm, and his hands in his pockets, prowled up and down the road on the western extremity of Hyde Park; and every time he passed a particular clump of trees, he muttered in a low, hoarse tone, "No one's made their appearance yet, old feller."

"They'll come, I dare say," was the responsive growl that came from behind the huge trunks of the leafless trees.

Then no more was said — and the Magsman resumed his walk, which the coldness of the night, however, accelerated into a short trot.

Presently he beheld some one approaching; and in a few minutes a man of middle height, enveloped in a capacious cloak, and having a black mask over all the upper part of his countenance, accosted the Magsman.

"You are punctual," said the stranger; and Warren instantly recognized the voice of the individual whom he had encountered at Mrs. Brace's abode and by whom the present appointment was made.

"I've been a-waiting for you this last half-hour," responded the Magsman; "and therefore I'm more than punctual. But what's the business about?"

"I presume you are not overparticular what you do to earn money?" said the stranger, interrogatively; and the Magsman could distinguish two dark eyes gleaming intently upon him through the holes in the mask.

"As little particular as a man can be in these hard times," was the response that he gave.

"You have your price for every species of crime which can be suggested to you?" continued the unknown querist.

"There's nothing you can name that I won't do," answered the Magsman, "provided the reward is a fat one. Now do you comprehend me, sir? For I suppose you want to be assured as to the lengths which I am prepared to go, before you open your mind to me," added the ruffian.

"You have accurately divined my intention," responded the stranger. Then, sinking his voice to the lowest audible whisper, he said, "And murder has its price as well as aught beside?"

"To be sure," exclaimed the Magsman. "For instance, if I thought you was putting a plant upon me now, I'd shoot you through the head as unceremoniously as I'd eat my dinner;" and the moonbeams glanced on the barrel of a pistol which he drew from his pocket.

"Put up your weapon, my good fellow," said the nobleman, for such, as the reader will remember, he was, although the Magsman was not aware of the circumstance. "We shall do some business together, instead of quarrelling, ere we part."

"So much the better. But I thought it as well just to let you see that I don't stand the slightest nonsense," observed the Magsman. "And now proceed with any more questions you may wish to put to me."

"From what took place between yourself and your wife the other night," resumed the stranger, "it is clear that you incur constant dangers by remaining in this country. Now, if you had your purse well filled, would you not like to try your fortunes on the other side of the Atlantic?"

"In America," ejaculated the Magsman, and he was about to give a decisive negative, accompanied with the remark that there was no place like London for a man of his profession, when suddenly checking himself, he substituted an affirmative answer, observing, "Yes, if it was made worth my while, I shouldn't at all mind visiting them free States which have thrown off the yoke of old George III. But if a murder is to be committed," he continued, with a coolness which made the nobleman shudder, though he himself had suggested that such a crime was in contemplation, "it

surely isn't necessary to go all the way to America to cut a chap's throat."

"Not at all," was the immediate answer. "But it suits my purpose that when the business which I have in hand shall be completed, those whom I may have engaged to carry it into execution shall be shipped without delay for America. If this proposal meets your views, well and good; if not, we may go our ways at once and no harm is done."

"Anything suits my book," said the Magsman, "as long as there's blunt forthcoming and plenty of it."

"I think, then, that we shall agree very shortly," observed the unknown. "Have you a faithful friend whom you can trust, a man like yourself —"

"As like me in villainy as two peas," interrupted the Magsman; "but I should say he was a trifle uglier in the face."

"And he would consent not only to bear his part in any crime," continued the nobleman, "but likewise to bid farewell to his native land for ever, and settle in America with the fruits of this service which I require?"

"I can answer for him as easily as for myself," replied Warren.

"Five thousand pounds, then, is the price which I offer for the deed that is to be done," said the stranger.

"'Tis a grand sum — two thousand five hundred apiece," observed the Magsman. "But how is it to be paid, all in a lump?"

"Decidedly not," was the emphatic answer; "or else what guarantee have I that you will embark for America, when once the money is in your pocket? These are the terms I propose: Five hundred pounds apiece, for you and your friend, the moment we reach the place where the deed is to be accomplished. Five hundred pounds more for each so soon as the deed shall have been accomplished. The remaining fifteen hundred pounds apiece to be paid when you stand on the deck of the vessel at Liverpool."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the Magsman. "These are terms which don't require much consideration. And now, when is the affair to be carried into execution?"

"To-night, if you can procure the aid of your friend at once," answered the nobleman; "and if not, to-morrow night, at latest."

"As for my friend," said Joe Warren, "I could get him with us in a brace of shakes; but the notice for to-night is so precious short, and we've both got friends to take leave of. Besides, I've a young woman I should like to take out with me, and my pal has got a daughter that he'd wish to say good-bye to —"

"You could both write to your friends from Liverpool," interrupted the nobleman; "and the young woman you speak of might follow you in the very next ship. Therefore, if you can possibly make arrangements for to-night, I shall be well pleased, inasmuch as my preparations are all in readiness."

"It shall be as you wish," said the Magsman. "And in the same way as you made preparation in the belief that the thing would come off to-night, so did I take a similar precaution in the expectation that there was business in hand which might probably give employment to two. Now then, Price, old feller, come along!" he exclaimed, bawling out loud.

"All right!" ejaculated a voice from a short distance; and at the same moment the Big Beggarman emerged from behind an adjacent knot of trees.

"I also am provided with weapons, understand," exclaimed the nobleman, in an impressive tone, to Joe Warren; "and I hesitate not to punish treachery."

Thus speaking he thrust forth his arms from beneath his cloak, and each hand grasped a pistol, the click of which as he cocked them fell sharply on the Magsman's ears.

"Lord bless ye, sir," ejaculated the latter, "me and my pal are as harmless as doves toward our patrons. Only, to tell you the truth, I didn't know but what some plant might be meant against me, in which case I had the Big Beggarman — for that's his name — close handy to assist. And it's lucky that I took such a precaution, since you want your business to come off to-night and it requires two to do it."

"Very lucky," observed the nobleman, laconically, as he concealed his weapons beneath his cloak. "But I leave you to explain matters to your companion."

Thus speaking, he walked a little way aside, keeping a sharp eye, however, through his mask upon the two villains, who were soon in earnest conversation together. Their discourse did not, however, last long; for, at the expiration of a

few minutes, the Magsman accosted the nobleman, saying, "I knew it would be all right, and I told you so. My pal is perfectly agreeable, and accepts the conditions which you've proposed. In fact, he's quite ready to cut as many throats from ear to ear as you may want us to try our hands upon."

"Follow me, then," exclaimed the nobleman, a cold shudder passing over his form as this terrible language fell upon his ears.

The party proceeded at a rapid pace until they reached the Tyburn Road on the northern boundary of Hyde Park; and beneath the shade of the trees overhanging the wall of Kensington Gardens a private carriage drawn by two horses was waiting. The lamps of the vehicle were not lighted, the blinds were drawn up, and no servant was in attendance save the postilion, who wore a drab greatcoat and a shawl-handkerchief coming up to his nose.

This individual opened the door in silence the moment he beheld his master approaching in company with the two men; and the three got into the carriage, one corner of which was already occupied by a female. The nobleman placed himself next to her; the Magsman and the Big Beggarman took their seat opposite, which was the one nearest the horses; and the postilion closed the door upon the party. In another moment the vehicle sped rapidly away down the road.

Complete darkness reigned inside, all the blinds being carefully drawn up. A long silence likewise prevailed, but this was presently interrupted by the nobleman offering the two ruffians refreshments, with which, it appeared, the pockets of the carriage were well supplied. Substantial sandwiches and flasks of brandy were presented to them; and in spite of the intense obscurity, neither the Magsman nor the Big Beggarman failed to find the way to their mouths.

The nobleman and the lady — for such she was — now began to converse together in the French language, although they were both English; but their knowledge of the Continental tongue enabled them to exchange observations without being understood by their two companions, who continued to eat and drink in silence.

In due time the vehicle stopped to change horses. The blinds were not disturbed, the halt was short, and away

sped the carriage again. The Magsman and the Beggarman, having by this time finished their sandwiches and emptied their flasks, snoozed off each into a comfortable nap, which lasted until the horses were changed again. Then, the relay being effected, they fell asleep once more; and thus, what with waking up at intervals and relapsing into slumber again, they whiled away several hours, the journey continuing the whole time.

At length the carriage halted altogether, and the lady let down the blind on one side, while the nobleman did the same on the other.

The gray dawn of morning rendered all things visible, but with a misty appearance; and the first impulse of the Magsman and the Beggarman was to cast their eyes upon the lady. But their survey of her was by no means comprehensive; for, like her male companion, she was wrapped in an ample cloak, and wore a mask concealing all the upper part of her countenance. Her hair was so arranged that but little of it was visible beneath her slouching gipsy bonnet; nevertheless, two or three straggling curls had fallen during the night, and these were of a dark glossy brown. The eyes that looked forth from behind the mask appeared of a deep blue, and the chin, which was completely visible, was sweetly rounded and dazzlingly fair. In fine, there was every indication, despite the disguise, that the lady was young, and even the coarse imaginations of the Beggarman and Joe Warren believed her to be beautiful.

From the lady their eyes were cast from the windows of the vehicle; and they found that the halt had taken place in a by-lane leading through a woody tract of country. At a distance of about a quarter of a mile, a small farmhouse reared its white walls and its heavy gables, picturesque even in the winter-time; and on an eminence, apparently a couple of miles farther on in the same direction, a spacious mansion seemed to command a view of the entire district.

These were the only habitations visible; but at a short distance ahead some kind of building was evidently in progress, for the poles of a scaffolding, the triangularly arranged props sustaining a huge stone, and unfinished walls of masonry met the eyes of the Magsman and the Beggarman as they leaned from the windows, sweeping the whole country around with their keen, searching looks.

But where they were, in what county, or in what part of England, they knew no more than the dead.

The postilion opened the door of the carriage; the nobleman immediately leaped out, assisted the lady to alight, and then bade the Magsman and the Big Beggarman follow.

Giving his arm to the lady, he led the way down the lane, toward the building which was in the course of being raised, and which proved, on a nearer view, to be a bridge partially erected and intended to span a stream of about thirty yards wide.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE CRIME ACCOMPLISHED

THE reader must now be made to understand that a huge hollow buttress, standing at the water's edge, had already been raised to a level with the bank which went sloping down; and in the interior of this buttress it was doubtless intended, as is usual in such cases, to deposit a specimen of each class of current coin, together with any other memorials of the actual year which fancy might dictate. The interior of the buttress was large; and over the opening was suspended the massive crowning stone, ready to be lowered whenever the attendant ceremony should be fixed to take place.

Having gained the end of the lane, which communicated with a road that ran from the spot where the bridge was being built to the farmhouse already alluded to, the lady abruptly quitted the party; and the nobleman said to his two hired ruffians, "We must conceal ourselves here for a short time."

They accordingly all three posted themselves behind a quantity of building-stones piled up in readiness to be used for the bridge; and as the trio were thus placed, no one passing along the road could possibly observe them.

The nobleman now began to give his instructions in a cool, calm, and deliberate manner.

"In the course of half an hour or so," he said, "that lady who has just left us will return down the road, proceeding toward the bridge. She will be accompanied by a young gentleman. They will pass on the other side of this pile of granite blocks; and you must both rush forth, seize upon the young gentleman, thrust this piece of sponge into his mouth as a gag, and then dispose of him in precisely the manner I shall dictate. You comprehend me?"

"There's no mistake about it, sir," observed the Magsman.

"Plain as the A B C," muttered the Big Beggarman.

"Here, then," resumed the unknown, producing a pocket-book and taking out a portion of its contents, "here, then, is a five-hundred-pound bank-note for each of you, according to agreement."

"That's what I call businesslike," said the Magsman, his eyes gloating over the flimsy representative of the sum named.

"And straightfor'ard," added the Big Beggarman, securing his own note about his person.

There was now a long silence, and every two or three minutes the nobleman looked anxiously in the direction of the farmhouse, whither the lady had gone. An increasing nervousness was perceptible in his manner, despite the mask that concealed all that portion of the countenance which expresses the feelings and denotes what is passing in the mind; and the chattering of his teeth was even audible every now and then. At length an ejaculation of pleasure escaped his lips; and the Magsman and Big Beggarman, looking in the same direction, beheld the lady retracing her way rapidly down the road, leaning on the arm of a gentleman.

The mists of that morning hour had by this time dispersed, and already did a faint quivering in the east denote that the sunbeams were endeavouring to force their way through the heavy atmosphere. The weather was cold, not with the crisp, exhilarating freshness of a frosty air, but with the more piercing, penetrating chill of dampness. But though the nobleman trembled, alike with the natural cold and from the influence of harrowing feelings, yet neither the Magsman nor the Big Beggarman appeared in the least degree uncomfortable.

And now, as the lady and the gentleman drew nearer and nearer as they came arm in arm along the road, Joe Warren and his accomplice were enabled to observe that the latter was young, apparently about two or three and twenty, tall, slender, handsome, and well dressed. By his manner, it seemed that he was conversing not only joyously but affectionately with his companion as they walked rapidly on; but from time to time he cast a furtive look behind him

toward the farmhouse, as if fearful of pursuit. All was still and quiet, however, in that direction.

The lady still wore her mask; but the elegance of her gait and the musical grace of her walk could not be concealed by the ample cloak which enveloped her, and the Magsman felt convinced that she belonged to the upper class. As for the Big Beggarman, he did not trouble himself much about the matter, his whole thoughts being centred in the reward that he was to gain and of which he had already received a handsome instalment as an earnest.

And now the fatal moment was at hand!

Forth sprang the Magsman and the Big Beggarman from behind the pile of granite blocks; forth they sprang, we say, like tigers bursting from their lair, and the young gentleman gave vent to a loud cry of mingled amazement and terror as their iron grasp was laid upon him. The masked lady stepped abruptly aside, so as to leave him completely at the mercy of the ruffians; and at that instant the conviction appeared to flash to the mind of the unhappy victim that she had betrayed him.

Then, ere the Magsman had time to thrust into his mouth the sponge which the nobleman had given him for the purpose, the young gentleman gave utterance to a moan of bitter anguish, accompanied by the mention of a female Christian name.

And that name was caught by the ears of the Magsman and the Big Beggarman; but the next moment the victim was silenced, for they thrust the gag into his mouth, despite the desperate struggles which he made and the maddened resistance which he offered.

"By Heaven! I will shoot him if he dares to utter another word!" exclaimed the nobleman, now springing forth from behind the granite blocks, with a pistol ready cocked in his hand.

"No, no!" cried the lady, in a stifling voice of profound emotion. "He is silenced now; spill not his blood."

"Bring him this way, my men," said the nobleman, hastily; and, taking the lady's hand, he led her in advance toward the bridge.

The young gentleman continued to struggle violently; but the united strength of the Magsman and Big Beggarman was irresistible, and they dragged him on toward the spot

which the nobleman and the lady had already reached, and whither the former was beckoning them with feverish excitement.

But all this took place in far less time than we are occupying in detailing it. Comparatively it was the work of a minute — one brief minute, in which fear, despair, agony, and the bitterness of death itself were all concentrated and compressed.

And, oh, horror of horrors! how can we find words to do justice to the crowning tragedy?

For, in obedience to the signs which the nobleman made, the Magsman and the Beggarman thrust the unhappy, writhing, struggling, despairing youth into the hollow of the buttress; yes, there they thrust him, into that hole they forced him down headlong, and then, loosening the winch-rope which sustained the massive stone above, they let it fall upon the mouth of this living tomb!

It was done, that tremendous deed was accomplished, this astounding crime was consummated.

And, stiffened with dread horror, the nobleman and the lady, appalled by the very tragedy of which they themselves had proved the directing archfiends, remained, transfixed as it were to the spot, with their eyes riveted on that crowning stone beneath which their victim had disappeared.

But the lady was the first to recover her presence of mind, the first to throw off the coils of remorse.

"Come," she said, suddenly starting from that statue-like immovability into which terror had temporarily paralyzed her, and laying her hand upon the arm of her companion, in order to arouse him likewise from the numbness and torpor of his senses, "come," she repeated, "for we have yet much to do."

"Would to God that we had never begun this dread work at all!" he murmured, in a tone so low that his words escaped the ears of the Magsman and the Big Beggarman.

"Coward! you are a coward!" said the lady, the reproach hissing savagely between her lips, as her eyes from behind the mask seemed to shoot forth living fire. "But, come, collect your energies, recall your courage," she added, immediately, and in a more conciliatory tone. "Remember all the advantages which will ensue from the deed just perpetrated."

"Oh, yes, advantages beyond number, — gold to gild the wounded conscience, broad lands to appease the worm of remorse!" ejaculated the nobleman; "marvellous advantages, truly!" and he laughed the fiendish, biting laugh which has the poison of hell in its mirth.

"Merciful God! compose yourself," said the lady, imploringly. "Those men will overhear you —"

"Pardon, forgive me, I knew not what I said nor what I did for the moment," interrupted the nobleman, pressing the lady's hand reassuringly. "Just now, when I proposed to fire upon him, it was you who were overcome by your feelings of horror, and now that the deed is done, it is my turn. But come, come away, let us depart. The morning is advancing, the masons will be coming."

"Come, then, and beware how you give rein to your tongue," whispered the lady, impressively.

The party now retraced their steps to the carriage. The nobleman and his fair companion resumed their places by each other's side, the Magsman and the Big Beggarman seated themselves opposite, the blinds were pulled up again, and the vehicle rolled rapidly away from the vicinage of the spot where so tremendous a crime had been perpetrated.

And still neither the Magsman nor the Big Beggarman entertained the slightest notion of where they were, nor what part of England had been made the theatre of so foul a tragedy.

For upwards of an hour did the carriage proceed without stopping, and at length it halted. The blinds were put down again, the party alighted, and the Magsman and Beggarman, on casting their looks around, perceived that the vehicle was standing at the door of a small but neat cottage on the threshold of which an old man and woman were bowing respectfully to the nobleman and the lady. This habitation stood in a lonely spot, by the side of a narrow road which evidently was not a great highway; and the ivy-covered tower of a village church peeped above a hill at a distance of about two miles.

The Magsman and the Big Beggarman were forthwith conducted by the old couple, who were dressed like peasants in comfortable circumstances, into a neat room serving alike as kitchen and parlour; and their eyes were not only gladdened by the appearance of a cheerful log fire blazing on the

ample hearth, but also by the preparations that were in progress for a comfortable breakfast. A clock, which stood in a corner of the room, showed them that it was now nine o'clock on this memorable morning.

The nobleman and lady remained outside in earnest conversation for nearly ten minutes, at the expiration of which period they entered the cottage. By this time the coffee was made by the old woman; and the lady, having hastily partaken of a cup, but without removing her mask, shook hands with the nobleman and returned to the carriage, which instantaneously drove away.

The unknown employer of the Magsman and the Big Beggarman now thrust another five-hundred-pound note into the hands of each, whispering, at the same time, "You are to remain here until the evening, when some little additional service — but of a less serious nature than the former," he observed, significantly, "will be required at your hands. I may as well state that it will be useless for you to put any questions to these good people," he added, turning his masked countenance for a moment toward the old man and woman, "inasmuch as they will turn a deaf ear to such inquiries. Moreover, should you even cross the threshold of the door without my permission, all the rest of our bargain becomes annulled in an instant and you forfeit the balance of the reward. Now do we understand each other?"

"Perfectly," answered the Magsman; "and neither me nor my pal will do anything for you to disapprove of."

"Sit down, then," said the nobleman, "and partake of the breakfast which is now served up."

The men to whom this invitation was addressed did not require a second bidding; but placing themselves at the table, they commenced a desperate onslaught on the hot coffee, home-made bread, rashers of bacon, and new-laid eggs which were served up with no niggard hand. The nobleman, taking off his cloak and appearing in a handsome suit of black, seated himself at a side-table, with his back toward the Magsman and the Big Beggarman, so that he might raise his mask conveniently to enable him to eat his breakfast without standing the chance of disclosing his features to those individuals.

The meal being concluded, the Magsman and Beggar-

man assented to a proposal which was made to them that they should take a few hours' rest in indemnification for the disturbed night which they had passed inside the carriage; and they were accordingly conducted to a bed-chamber. There they slept until the old man came to arouse them at two o'clock in the afternoon, with the agreeable intimation that dinner was ready; and, on descending to the lower room, they found a smoking joint, flanked with dishes of vegetables and jugs of home-brewed ale, already served upon the table. To this repast they did ample justice, while the nobleman partook of his dinner at the side-table.

But even if this personage had not wished to place himself in such a manner that he could eat unobserved by the Magsman and Beggarman, even, we mean, if he had worn no mask at all, still he would not have taken a seat at the same table with them. No, that insufferable pride which animates the English aristocracy would have made him loathe and abhor the idea of associating so intimately with men belonging to a lower grade; for not even the companionship of crime, the complicity of murder, no, not even this hideous connection could have induced him to fraternize with the paid instruments of his dark iniquity.

The meal being concluded, pipes and tobacco were supplied to the Magsman and his companion, who addressed themselves to the enjoyment thereof accordingly; and the nobleman retired up-stairs, most probably to snatch a few hours rest. At all events, he did not reappear until tea was prepared, at about seven o'clock, Joe Warren and the Beggarman having in the interval smoked countless pipes and emptied numerous jugs of ale.

After tea the two men resumed their pipes; but instead of malt liquor they were now regaled with gin, and by the assistance of the tobacco and the spirits they whiled away the time pleasantly enough until ten o'clock, when an excellent supper was set before them. Of this meal the nobleman refused to partake; but Joe Warren and the Big Beggarman did ample justice to it, for, as they laughingly observed to the people of the house, "eating and drinking never came amiss to them."

At eleven o'clock the nobleman resumed his cloak, beneath which he concealed a dark lantern lent him by the

old man, who likewise produced a shovel, a pickax, and a bag containing some smaller implements. Of these things the Magsman and the Big Beggarman took charge; and, guided by their unknown employer, they sallied forth from the cottage.

The moon shone brightly, illuminating the whole scene around and bringing the ivy-covered tower of the village church into strong relief. And it was toward this church that the nobleman led his two agents of evil across the fields, a journey which was performed in silence and without meeting a single soul.

CHAPTER XL

THE CHURCH

THE party entered the churchyard, which was crowded with tombstones that gleamed with spectral-like ghastliness in the cold moonlight; and the Magsman began to wonder whether the employer of himself and the Beggarman intended them to perform a little business in the resurrection way before he parted from them.

But the nobleman passed straight along the narrow path which, intersecting the cemetery, led to the church door; and here he stopped. The bag, of which the Big Beggarman had taken charge, furnished a bunch of keys, one of which speedily turned in the lock. The door was thrust open, and the nobleman entered the church with his companions.

The deep silence of the place struck as solemnly upon the heart as the intense chill of the atmosphere did upon the exterior senses, and it was evident that the nobleman felt a species of superstitious awe steal over him, for his hand trembled as he produced the dark lantern from beneath his cloak. As for the Magsman and the Beggarman, they knew not fear of any kind; and the effect of the profound stillness upon their minds was of the most evanescent description.

Passing along the aisle, the nobleman led the way to a small cloistral-looking nook, separated from the body of the church by a screen of sculptured stone, and evidently set apart for the monuments of those families which possessed hereditary sepulchres there.

Stooping down and throwing the light of the lantern in such a manner upon the pavement that he could read the inscriptions graven there, the nobleman in a few moments pointed out a particular stone, which he bade the two men raise by the help of certain implements which they would

find in the bag. At the same time he charged them to perform their work in such a manner that when replaced, the stone should afford no indication of having been recently raised.

The bag, as the nobleman intimated, was found to contain not only all the requisite tools for accomplishing the task now described, but likewise a box of cement for the purpose of refixing the stone in its setting. To work the Magsman and the Big Beggarman therefore went, their employer holding the dark lantern in such a way that while it effectually assisted them, its beams never once permitted them to read a single word of the inscription graven on the stone which they were removing.

In half an hour this huge fragment of the dull blue pavement was lifted away from the mouth of the vault which it covered; and a narrow flight of stone steps appeared, leading down into the deep darkness of a sepulchre whence a noisome effluvium exhaled, — that peculiar odour which has nought like it, and which at once, even when the source is unknown, carries to the sense a conviction of the vicinage of decomposing mortality.

Having allowed some minutes to elapse for the foul air thus to expend itself, the nobleman bade his two assistants descend into the vault. They obeyed, and he hastened to follow them with the lantern in his hand.

The subterranean vault was spacious; and around the walls were numerous coffins, in three rows, the lowest standing upon the paved floor, and the other two resting on stout iron supporters projecting from the solid masonry. By these means no coffin actually stood upon another; and between the rows there was space sufficient to enable the plates upon the lids to be examined without moving the coffins themselves.

Despite, however, of the interval allowed for the exhalation of the foul air, the stench which prevailed in the vault was almost intolerable; and the Magsman observed, with a terrible imprecation, that "the sooner they did whatever business there was to do, the better he should like it." With the propriety of this suggestion the Big Beggarman signified his concurrence in a remark that began and ended with oaths more horrible than even the one to which his companion had given utterance; and the blood of the

nobleman actually curdled in his veins as this hideous language struck appallingly upon his ears.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, almost sinking beneath the shuddering effects of the cold tremor that passed over him; "such dreadful language is enough to awaken those who sleep around you."

"Me and my pal ain't afraid of the dead, sir," growled the Magsman, with a chuckle which seemed to strike upon the nobleman's mind as something that did him harm.

"I should think not!" exclaimed the Big Beggarman, with even a coarser and more brutal laugh. "I never did see any ghostesses yet, and if so be the dead does walk at times, this is a very favourable opportunity for one of 'em to get up and enjoy a mouthful of fresh air."

But scarcely were these words uttered, when a tremendous explosion, like the report of a cannon, sounded through the vault, accompanied with an effluvium so horrible, so nauseating, so stifling, as scarcely to leave the nobleman and his two assistants the power to scramble up the stone steps and retreat into the purer air of the aisle of the church.

The lantern, which the masked unknown carried in his hand, threw its gleaming rays upon the disturbed and agitated countenances of the two men, whose souls were now filled with a consternation which they vainly endeavoured to conceal from each other.

"What the devil could that have been, Joe?" demanded the Big Beggarman, throwing a stealthy look around him, as if he almost expected to see some hideous shape emerging from the obscurity that reigned beyond the scope of the lamplight.

"I should say that it was Satan warning us not to trespass in his domains," answered the Magsman, with an effectual attempt at a chuckle; for the fellow was so bewildered by a din to him utterly unaccountable as to be really frightened, although he endeavoured to put a good face upon the matter.

"Banish your fears," said the nobleman, who had remained silent for a few minutes in order, most probably, that the recent occurrence should have time to produce a certain effect upon the men and induce them to abstain from that horrible language in which they had indulged in the vault and which sounded like tremendous blasphemy in

his ears; but now, perceiving that the incident was not calculated to produce any such beneficial effect, he thought it useless to delay any longer an explanation of the phenomenon which had frightened them. "The noise which startled us all three," he accordingly continued, "and which drove us so quickly from the vault, was caused by the sudden explosion of a leaden coffin."

"Well, I'm blowed if ever I should have thought of that!" exclaimed the Big Beggarman.

"It is, nevertheless, as I tell you," resumed the nobleman; "and you can now understand likewise the cause of the dreadful odour which assailed us at the same moment that the din fell upon our ears. It was from the effluvium, and not from the explosive din, that I beat so rapid a retreat. But we may now return to the vault."

Thither they accordingly retraced their steps, and, when once more under ground, they perceived that one of the coffins on the uppermost row, at the farther extremity, had burst completely open, and that a half-decomposed corpse was exposed to view. A shudder passed visibly over the nobleman's frame, for his hand trembled so violently that he nearly dropped the lantern; but, regaining his composure with a great effort, he averted his eyes from the ghastly spectacle, and began to examine the plates on the coffins of the highest tier on the right hand side from the entrance.

While thus engaged, his back was turned toward the Magsman and the Big Beggarman; but every other instant he cast a rapid glance furtively around to assure himself that they were contemplating no treachery of any kind. In a few minutes he discovered the particular coffin-plate which, as it appeared, he sought; and, while his eyes lingered upon the inscription, the Magsman, who on his side had been rigidly though unsuspectingly watching all his movements, suddenly plucked off a signet-ring from one of the fingers of the corpse that lay exposed in the broken leaden coffin.

This was the work of an instant; the nobleman saw it not, and, while the Big Beggarman nodded approvingly, Joe Warren secured the ring in his waistcoat pocket. But scarcely was the feat performed, when the employer of the two ruffians turned around and bade them take a chisel from the bag and remove the plate from the particular coffin to which he pointed. This was soon done, the nobleman hold-

ing the lantern in such a manner that, while it assisted the operation, it permitted not the operators themselves to read the inscription on the plate.

"What next?" demanded the Magsman, as the nobleman secured about his person the plate, upon which he seized the moment it was wrenched away from the coffin-lid.

"Hold a light, and stand a little farther off," was the response.

Joe Warren and the Beggarman accordingly fell back a few paces, the former receiving the lantern from the hands of the nobleman, who now producing another plate from beneath his cloak, proceeded to fasten it on in the place whence the old one had been removed. This task was easily accomplished by means of four black screws and a screw-driver taken from the bag.

"Now we have done all our business in the vault," said the nobleman; and, receiving back the lantern from the Magsman, he led the way from the noisome place, which was still pervaded with a stifling fetid odour that made the stomach sick, the heart heave, and the tongue experience a thick, clammy, and nauseating taste.

The Magsman and the Beggarman replaced the stone over the mouth of the vault; the box of cement, already alluded to, was brought into requisition; and the entire pavement, now uniform once more, was swept lightly with a small brush supplied with the bag, so that there was not the slightest indication nor appearance calculated to excite a suspicion of the sanctuary for the dead having been disturbed. And it may likewise be as well to reiterate the observation that while thus employed in consigning the huge flag back to its setting, the two men were not permitted by the masked unknown to catch a glimpse of the inscription graven upon it.

"Now follow me," he said, when this portion of the task was accomplished; and, quitting the cloistral nook, he led the way to the farther end of the church, where one of the keys upon the large bunch already mentioned soon opened a door near the communion-table.

The party now entered the vestry, which was a small room, carpeted, and surrounded by bench-seats. A surplice and black gown hung against the wall; and in a half-open cupboard an empty decanter and two or three wine-glasses

appeared upon a shelf. Over the mantelpiece there was a diminutive mirror, to the nail sustaining which a pair of clerical bands was hanging. From one side of the vestry-room a sort of closet opened; and in this recess was kept the iron safe containing the parish registers.

Giving the lantern to the Magsman, the nobleman tried the small keys of his bunch, one after the other, without any effect. The door of the iron safe remained immovable; the lock afforded no symptoms of yielding.

"If it do not give way by fair means, it shall by foul," exclaimed the unknown, the lower portion of his countenance, which the mask left revealed, flushing with the excitement of impatience and vexation.

"Me and my pal would soon make light work of it," observed the Magsman. "There's plenty of implements in the bag that would force the obstinate safe."

"In fact," added the Big-Beggarman, thinking it necessary to thrust in a word, "there's no safety at all in a safe when me and Joe Warren are concerned."

"You shall try your hands upon it if I cannot manage it without violence," said the nobleman. "But see — this key appears to fit it — yes — it yields — it yields!" he exclaimed, with an inexpressible outburst of joy, which led his two assistants to believe that this was not the least important incident in the night's adventures. "Now that your services are not required for the moment," continued the unknown, as he drew forth one of the registers from the safe, "you can seat yourselves and dispose of a flask of brandy while I inspect this book."

Thus speaking, he produced a case-bottle from beneath his cloak; and while the two ruffians sat down upon one of the benches in the vestry to enjoy it, the nobleman placed himself at the table for the purpose of examining the register.

With the lantern near him in such a manner that its light fell upon the pages as he turned them slowly over after a careful inspection of each, the unknown bent over the huge parochial volume with an attitude that denoted an absorbing interest; and though all the upper portion of his countenance was concealed by the black mask, yet there was an expression about the mouth which indicated a profound anxiety lest the record that he sought should not be there.

Leaf after leaf did he turn over; a quarter of an hour

passed; the men emptied the brandy-flask, and then they conversed in low whispers. The nobleman seemed to have forgotten their presence, so profoundly absorbed was he in the register; and thus, while he was diligently searching for some entry, the ensuing dialogue took place between them.

"This is the rummest lark altogether that I ever knew in all my life," observed the Magsman.

"It's a reglar romance," returned the Big Beggarman. "But have you any idea whereabouts in England we are?"

"Not the remotest," was the response. "To do the gentleman justice, he has managed matters so well that he has even baffled us in that respect. But the day may come, my fine feller," added the Magsman, significantly, "when we shall find out everything that is now strange and mysterious. At prèsent we've two distinct clues —"

"Two!" repeated the Big Beggarman; "how d'ye make that out? I only know of the signet-ring which you took off the finger of the mouldy stiff'un down in the vault."

"And the Christian name of that lady," added the Magsman. "Didn't you catch it?"

"To be sure I did!" was the reply. "What a fool I am to overlook such an important point. Besides, such a peculiar Christian name too."

"Ah! it was a nice-looking young feller that screamed out that name," observed the Magsman. "It was almost a pity to put him into the hole. I wonder who the deuce he could have been."

"And while you're wondering, you may just as well wonder about who the lady was also, and who our friend there is," continued the Big Beggarman, nodding his head toward the nobleman, who was still poring over the register. "But I say, Joe," added the ruffian, sinking his voice to a whisper that was scarcely audible, "what's to prevent us from knocking him on the head and helping ourselves to the contents of his pocketbook, instead of waiting till he pays us the balance at Liverpool?"

"Lord bless ye, my dear Stephen," returned the Magsman, in the same subdued tone, "do you suppose that I haven't been thinking of the same thing ever since I saw him take out his pocketbook for the first time, this morning when we were standing behind the pile of granite blocks? To be

sure I have, and when we were smoking our pipes after dinner in the cottage, I was half a mind to propose to you to cut his throat and the old man's and woman's throats also, and so make light work of the business at once. But I thought better of it, and I tell you now that it's more to our interests to let things take their course."

"How so?" demanded the Beggarman. "Suppose the pocketbook contained more than he has still got to pay us, then we should be the gainers."

"And suppose it contains less?" returned the Magsman, with a knowing look; "in this case we should be the losers. And it may be probable that the gentleman intends to get more money at Liverpool, or that he has left his pocketbook behind him at the cottage."

"Well, there's certainly them chances against us," said the Beggarman, in a musing tone, although still speaking in a low whisper.

"But that's not the only caculation I've been making," continued the Magsman. "Of course we don't mean to go to America; that you and me have already decided upon between ourselves. Well, now, suppose we some day find out who he is, and who the lady is, and what all this business means? Why, let his fortune be whatever it will, at least half of it must find its way into our pockets. He couldn't refuse it, nor the lady either, whoever she is. They're completely in our power; and as they're no doubt well off already, and most likely mean to be much richer still, — for this affair hasn't been undertaken for nothing, mark ye, — it will be a splendid thing for us to find out who they are and have a hold upon them."

"You're right, Joe," observed the Big Beggarman, convinced by this reasoning; "we mustn't knock him on the head. He'll be more use to us living, — I see that now."

"To be sure," rejoined the Magsman; and, the question being thus disposed of, the matter dropped.

But while the two ruffians had been thus coolly and calmly deliberating upon the propriety or impropriety of assassinating their masked employer, he on his part had succeeded in discovering the particular record which he sought in the parochial volume. A smile played upon his lips, and he rubbed his hands together joyfully. Then, taking a pen-knife from his pocket, he carefully scratched out certain

words in that entry which regarded his interests or his views; and with equal caution he rubbed over it a very fine powder, or species of pounce, which he had brought for the purpose. The effect was that when he wrote other words in the place of those which he had erased, the ink did not run with an improper thickness upon the paper, nor afford any sign or indication that such a substitution had taken place. In fact, the forgery was complete and faultless in its execution; the handwriting of the original entry was imitated to a nicety, and when the ink was entirely dry, the nobleman rubbed the paper gently with the tip of his forefinger on which he collected a little dust by passing it along the mantelpiece. The result was to take away from the leaf that whiteness which appeared where the penknife had scratched it; and the page thus wore a uniform aspect, as if it had never been tampered with.

The register was now returned to its place, the safe was locked again, and the nobleman quitted the vestry, followed by his two agents. Along the aisle they proceeded, their footsteps raising echoes which made it seem as if there were other midnight visitors in the church; but this they knew to be a delusion, and in safety they emerged from the temple which their presence had so desecrated.

The nobleman was careful to lock the door behind him; and the trio retraced their way through the cemetery, across the fields, back to the cottage, at the door of which they found the travelling-carriage in readiness.

The reader will remember that the masked lady had taken her departure in the vehicle immediately after breakfast in the morning; and it had now returned to convey the nobleman and his two hired bravoës to Liverpool.

The old couple were sitting up at the cottage, into which the Magsman and the Beggarman were invited to enter and partake of some hasty refreshment. The clock in the room showed them it was nearly two in the morning; and thus their nocturnal expedition had occupied three hours.

While they were regaling themselves with some cold meat and hot spirits and water, the nobleman presented them each with a hundred pounds, observing, "This is for the extra work which you have done to-night. The balance of the large sum due to both of you shall be paid, according to

agreement, when you stand upon the deck of the American packet at Liverpool."

The men expressed their satisfaction; and, the meal being concluded, they entered the carriage, followed by the nobleman.

The blinds were drawn up, total darkness reigned within, and the vehicle rolled rapidly away, thus perpetuating that deep mystery which had all along been maintained toward the Magsman and the Big Beggarman respecting the whereabouts of those scenes through which they had passed, and the locality of those incidents in which they had borne so large a share.

CHAPTER XLI

THE WAYSIDE COTTAGE — THE ACCIDENT

THE journey was continued in profound silence, for the nobleman did not choose to converse with his hireling assassins, and the two men themselves, overcome with weariness, soon fell into a profound slumber. Even when the carriage stopped to change horses, they did not wake up; but at length they were aroused by some one shaking them violently, and then they found that several hours must have passed away. For the blinds were down, the misty gray light of the dawn was throwing a sort of half-relief upon the tall buildings of a town at a short distance, and the vehicle was standing at the door of a small cottage, not half so comfortable-looking as the one which had previously afforded the men such good cheer.

The nobleman it was who had aroused his followers; and they all alighted at this dwelling, the only inhabitant of which appeared to be a very aged but bustling, active woman, remarkably clean though homely in her apparel. She conducted them into her cottage, where the table was already spread for breakfast; and it therefore struck both the Magsman and the Beggarman that their presence was not unexpected. The idea was confirmed when the nobleman, bidding them follow him up-stairs, conducted them to a chamber where he showed them two trunks full of clothing, observing, at the same time, "Here is a complete wardrobe for each of you; so that the instant we reach Liverpool you will have nothing to do but to step on board a ship which will sail immediately afterward. But you will do well to throw aside the apparel you now have on, and dress yourselves in the garments provided for you. In a word, it

will be prudent to make yourselves look as decent and respectable as possible."

Having thus spoken, the masked unknown quitted the chamber, closing the door behind him.

"Well, I'm blowed if things ain't done by magic nowadays," said the Magsman. "In the first place, a carriage was ready waiting for us the night before last when we met our employer in Hyde Park; then, when we reached the bridge, yesterday morning, the lady had nothing to do but walk up to the house and lead forth her victim, just for all the world as if she carried a wand which he was bound to obey. Next we are whirled away to a cottage where a comfortable old couple have got everything nice and in readiness to entertain us. At night, a bag is furnished with every implement necessary for the visit to the church vault, even to the very keys that are to open the church doors themselves. And now we come this morning to another cottage, where breakfast is ready to serve up, and where a couple of trunks full of all kinds of toggery are waiting for us."

"It looks like a fairy-tale, Joe," said the Beggarman. "But instead of troubling ourselves about how the trunks and the toggery come here, let us inspect the first and try on the last."

"So we will," observed the Magsman.

The examination of the boxes accordingly commenced; and in each one was found two suits of clothes, shirts, stockings, handkerchiefs, hair-brushes, combs, shaving-tackle, boots, — in fine, everything necessary for the outfit of men who were about to undertake a tolerably long voyage. The clothing was of good but plain materials, and was of that kind which a respectable artisan or operative would purchase.

"Well," ejaculated the Big Beggarman, at last breaking the long silence which had prevailed during the inspection of the various articles, "as sure as my name is Stephen Price, I mean to transmogrify myself in a jiffy. I've taken a sudden fit of cleanliness into my head, and I'll see if I can't make myself look a little respectable."

"You'll never look anything else but a gallows'-bird," said the Magsman, with a coarse laugh.

"Well, Joe," was the retort, "whenever I mount the scaffold, you won't be many paces either before or behind me, and the same funeral service will do for us both. But here

is a capital razor; and I mean to have a good shave on the chin at present, whether or not Jack Ketch shall hereafter have the handling of my throat."

The two men proceeded to perform their toilet; and having washed and shaven themselves, they each put on clean linen and a new suit of clothes.

"Somehow or another, I don't feel comfortable when toggged off in this fashion," said the Magsman, as he surveyed himself in a little looking-glass that hung to the whitewashed wall of the humble chamber. "You know that even when I've had hundreds of pounds in my pockets, I've never put myself out of the way to look clean or decent; and an old rough coat has always pleased me better than a new one. The fact is, Stephen, respectability don't suit me."

"And I never liked it until now," responded the Big Beggarman. "But I mean to give it a fair trial for a short time."

"I'm afraid you're too ugly, Stephen, to play your new part properly," observed the Magsman, chuckling at the compliment which he thus paid his associate. "But let's go down-stairs and see if breakfast's ready; for I'm as hungry as if I hadn't had anything to eat for a month past."

"Come along, then," said the Beggarman; and they descended accordingly.

In the room below, the masked unknown was already partaking of coffee at a side-table; and the old woman hastened to serve up a copious repast to the two men, who did speedy and ample justice to the fare.

The nobleman glanced toward them, to assure himself that they had obeyed his instructions and rendered themselves as decent and respectable-looking as possible; and, being satisfied on that point, he said to the old woman, "Have the goodness to pack up the two trunks without delay, so that they may be in readiness by the time the carriage returns with the fresh horses."

"Yes, my lord," responded the old crone, dropping a curtsy.

"Perdition!" ejaculated the nobleman, instantaneously perceiving that the quick ears of the Magsman and Beggarman had caught those telltale words which betrayed his rank; and starting from his seat, he walked once or twice,

hastily and evidently in great irritation, up and down the room.

"I beg pardon — sir — my —" stammered the old woman, comprehending the fatal error which she had committed by allowing her tongue to give such glib and ready utterance to the sounding distinction of "My lord."

"Begone, and do as I have commanded you," said the unknown, pointing imperiously toward the staircase, up which the old woman hurried with an agility that was truly marvellous for one of such advanced age as she evidently was.

The Magsman and Beggarman proceeded with their breakfast as if nothing extraordinary had happened, and forebore from any remark on the little incident which had just revealed to them the fact that their employer was of aristocratic rank; for it will be remembered that although the readers have all along been aware that the masked unknown was a nobleman, his dialogue with Mrs. Brace on the night of the Magsman's intrusion having caused that circumstance to transpire, yet that the two ruffians now became acquainted with it for the first time.

But in spite of the seeming air of indifference with which they continued to attack the copious fare set before them, it had been evident to the nobleman at the first glance which he cast toward them as the fatal "My lord" fell from the old woman's lips, that their ears had not failed to catch the words; and he could scarcely control even within moderate bounds the rage which he experienced toward the crone whose inadvertence had thus betrayed his rank. But he soon began to reflect that although his hireling assassins had learned that he was a lord, they were still in utter ignorance of his title; and consoling himself with this fact, he thought it prudent not to condescend to the slightest remark on the occurrence. He even spoke in a civil and conciliatory manner to the old woman when she returned to the room, evidently for the purpose of soothing her feelings for the irritation he had previously shown.

The Magsman and the Beggarman, having finished their breakfast, were desired by the nobleman to fetch down their trunks, which the crone had packed up for them; and, on ascending to the chamber for this purpose, Joe Warren observed, in a low whisper and with a significant look, "Wasn't I right, my good feller, when I made up my mind not to knock

this nib-like cove on the head? Now we've discovered that he's a lord, and it's probable the lady that was with us all the night before last is of high rank also. Let me tell you, Stephen, that this is as pleasant and promising an affair as we have ever had in hand."

"And we'll make the most of it, Joe," responded the Big Beggarman. "It ought to prove as good as an annuity for us."

Having thus exchanged their sentiments, the two ruffians shouldered their trunks and descended to the ground floor again. The carriage, which had driven away to change horses during breakfast-time, returned in a few minutes, and the men lashed their luggage on to the roof. They then entered the vehicle, the nobleman followed them, the blinds were drawn up once more, and the journey was continued at a rapid rate.

Between three and four hours passed away, during which the horses had been changed twice, when the carriage suddenly broke down as it was whirling speedily on. The nobleman instantly put down the blinds, opened the door, and leaped out; and a glance at the fore axletree, which had snapped in halves, convinced him that some hours must elapse ere the accident could be repaired.

Having consulted with the postilion for a few moments, he returned to the carriage door and desired the two men to alight. Then drawing them aside beyond ear-shot of the postboy, he said, "You perceive that our journey has experienced an interruption, and we must therefore part company at once. Those buildings which rise above yonder trees belong to the town of Warrington; and Liverpool is only seventeen or eighteen miles distant from that place. You will proceed thither without delay; and on arriving at Liverpool, inquire for the *Royal George* brig. You will find the captain on board; and upon your telling him that your names are Jones and Thompson, he will instantly assign you to the berths which have been already engaged and paid for on your account."

"All that is easy enough," said the Magsman; "and the arrangements have no doubt been made in capital style. But who's to pay us the other fifteen hundred apiece which is still due? No offence, my lord — but —"

"Silence!" ejaculated the nobleman, imperiously. "You

have surely had sufficient proofs of my generosity to be well aware that I am not likely to deceive or defraud you in any one respect. It never was my intention to accompany you all the way to Liverpool, though it certainly was not my purpose to part from you at such a distance as this. But arrangements had already been made respecting the payment of the remaining amount due to each of you; and so soon as you have taken possession of your berths on board the *Royal George*, the captain, who has been led to believe that you are political offenders voluntarily deporting yourselves in order to escape a severer sentence, will place fifteen hundred pounds in the hands of each.

"And if he should prove to be a rascal and stick to the blunt?" said the Magsman, not altogether admiring the arrangement.

"You have nothing to fear, my good fellow," rejoined the nobleman, in a tone of decision. "It is neither consistent with my views nor my interest to afford you any excuse or pretext for remaining in England. The money will therefore be paid to you as faithfully and as honourably as the instalments which you have already received."

"But why can't you settle with us now, my lord?" demanded the Magsman, his tone and aspect assuming a slight degree of menace.

"For two reasons," was the prompt and resolute answer. "Because I choose you to quit England, according to our bargain, and because I have not sufficient funds about my person to liquidate one-tenth part of the amount now due to you. Look here, my good fellow," he continued, in a still more impressive and significant tone, while his eyes, shining through the mask, were fixed earnestly and searchingly on the Magsman's countenance, "you will reap no advantage by being obstinate or attempting to frustrate my will. If you rebel against my authority now, why, we must fight it out with our pistols, that's all; and if you kill me, you will not have improved your own position one jot. As for any threats of exposure which you might utter, I laugh at them and defy you. We will not mince matters: you have learned, through the inadvertency of a foolish old woman who forgot the injunctions of secrecy which she had received, that I am a nobleman. Well, granted that I am, granted even that you discover what my title is, who on earth would believe

your tale if you were to narrate all that has occurred within the last forty-eight hours? Besides, even were it believed, would you not be criminating yourselves as seriously as me? On the other hand, suppose that I were to accuse you of having stopped me on this highway and robbed me of all the bank-notes which you have in your possession, in what predicament would you be then? You therefore perceive then, my good fellows, that it is useless for you to show your teeth at me; and you had better make up your minds to continue on the same pleasant and agreeable understanding which has hitherto prevailed."

"I'm sure we don't want to quarrel with your lordship," said the Magsman, who could not shut his eyes to the truth of all the reasoning which had just fallen upon his ears. "But you must see that you have got entirely the advantage of us. You know who we are, and we don't know who you are; you have got money to pay us, and we have no means of obtaining it unless you choose to give it; and when once on board the ship, we shall be prisoners, no doubt, and unable to come on shore again even if the captain should refuse to hand us over the balance due to us."

"Once for all, I tell you that the money will be paid to you, and I can say no more," exclaimed the nobleman, angrily; "unless, indeed, it be to remind you of the regularity, the precision, and the forethought which have characterized all the proceedings from the moment we left London until the present time, and which ought to serve you as sufficient evidence that the person or persons by whom all these arrangements have been so effectually made are not likely to fall into any error or mistake relative to so paltry a detail in the grand drama as the ensuring to you the punctual and honourable payment of the balance due. No, my good fellows, money is not such an object to me as to render it necessary that I should cheat you, or suffer you to be cheated. Moreover, I may as well observe that the captain of the *Royal George* will deliver you each a sealed letter, enclosing the sums due; but he is not even acquainted with the nature of the contents of those letters, and has not, therefore, any inducement to purloin them."

"Well, I suppose we must take your lordship's word," said the Magsman, after exchanging a look with the Beggarman.

"In that case you had better lose no time in continuing your journey," observed the nobleman. "Warrington is before you, and you can easily carry your trunks on your shoulders into that town. A conveyance to Liverpool may be obtained without difficulty; and in a few hours you will be standing on the deck of the *Royal George*."

"Come along, then, mate," exclaimed the Magsman.

The two ruffians accordingly took down their trunks from the roof of the travelling-carriage, threw them upon their shoulders, bade the nobleman farewell, and jogged leisurely along the road to Warrington.

While thus journeying on, Mr. Joseph Warren and Mr. Stephen Price discussed their plans and laid down the course which circumstances now rendered it necessary for them to pursue; but as the resolutions to which they thus came will transpire in the sequel, we need not record them now. Suffice it, therefore, to say that on gaining Warrington they entered a tavern, where they ordered dinner; and while it was being gotten ready, they wrote letters to the Gallows' Widow and Carrotty Poll in London. These they conveyed to the post with their own hands, some hanger-on about the inn showing them the way; and, having enjoyed a hearty meal, they took their places outside a coach bound to Liverpool.

The short distance of eighteen miles was accomplished pleasantly enough; for the two men smoked cigars the whole way, and got down to refresh themselves with glasses of ale every time the vehicle stopped.

It was about five o'clock in the evening when they entered Liverpool; and on inquiring in the proper quarter, they soon ascertained that a brig called the *Royal George* was lying in the Mersey, ready to sail for the United States of North America. A boat conveyed them on board the vessel; and, on being introduced to the captain, they announced themselves, the Magsman by the name of Jones and the Big Beggarman by the appellation of Thompson.

"All right," said the skipper, who was a short, thick-set, bullet-headed, red-faced man, attired in a complete suit of rough blue, and with a gold-laced band around his cap. "Come down below, mates, and we'll have two or three words in private together."

The Magsman and the Big Beggarman followed the captain down the companion-ladder into a neat little cabin,

lighted by a lamp suspended to the ceiling; for as it was now past sunset and the shades of night were gathering fast around, the stern windows looked dull and lustreless as lead.

"Sit down, my friends, make yourselves at home," said the captain, as he opened a locker and produced a bottle of spirits, glasses, and cigars. "We shall have a pleasant trip, and my instructions are to treat you as well as the rough accommodations of shipboard will permit. Come, help yourselves; the grog is good, the Havanas excellent."

"Have you got any letters for us?" demanded the Magsman, scarcely able to curb his impatience; for he naturally considered that the response to this question would prove at once whether the nobleman had acted honourably or had played a treacherous part.

"Yes, one for Mr. Jones, and t'other for Mr. Thompson," said the captain, producing two sealed packets from the locker whence he had taken the refreshments. "Here they are, and I'll leave you to read them by yourselves for a few minutes while I give some orders on deck."

Thus speaking, the mariner threw the letters upon the table, and then quitted the cabin, closing behind him the door at the bottom of the companion.

"Well, I suppose it's all right," said the Big Beggarman, opening the packet addressed to Mr. Thompson, while his companion proceeded to inspect the one directed to Mr. Jones.

"Damnation!" thundered the latter, suddenly breaking the short pause which had occurred, during which they had both run their eyes over the contents of the letters. "We weren't prepared for this, Price!" he exclaimed, in a tone of diabolical ferocity, at the same time dashing his clenched fist so violently down upon the table that he made the bottle and glasses dance with a jingling sound.

"He's got the better of us so far, Joe," returned the Big Beggarman, in a voice expressive of a more deeply concentrated rage. "But what's to be done?"

At this moment the cheerful chorus of the sailors, accompanying the heaving up of the anchor, came swelling and oscillating upon the ears of the two men; and they knew thereby that the ship was about to sail.

Springing from his seat with the fury of a goaded lion, the Magsman tore open the door and rushed up the companion-

ladder; but his head came in contact with something that barred his way. He thrust up his hands in the darkness, and they encountered the hatch, which was fast battened down over the aperture communicating with the deck. A growl, terrible and savage as that of a hyena, burst from his throat; and with all his Herculean strength he endeavoured to force up the trap-door.

But it resisted his efforts as completely as if he were struggling to move the most solid masonry; and, baffled, defeated, and furious, he stepped back again into the cabin, where he filled a tumbler to the brim with raw spirit, which he drank at a single draught.

"We are done, old feller, done as nicely as that scoundrel of a nobleman could possibly have wished!" he exclaimed, at length, when the stifling sensation of the fiery alcohol had somewhat passed out of his throat.

"So I see," observed the Beggarman, who appeared to take the matter more coolly than his companion. "But it will be a very strange and very unusual thing, Joe, if any one gets the better of us for long together."

"True, my dear feller," rejoined the Magsman; "and it isn't by putting ourselves into a passion that we shall mend the present aspect of affairs. Come, let's drink and smoke, since we're prisoners in this infernal den of a cabin; and to-morrow, when our heads are cool and we've slept over it, we shall be better able to discuss what's to be done in the present emergency."

"Agreed," exclaimed the Big Beggarman, lighting a cigar by the lamp that swung overhead.

And while the two ruffians were regaling themselves in the cabin, the anchor was weighed, the sails were unfurled, and the *Royal George* began to plough the deep waters of the Mersey.

CHAPTER XLII

ROYALTY'S MORNING AMUSEMENT

It was about half-past ten o'clock in the morning, and the Prince of Wales, wrapped in an elegant dressing-gown, was seated in one of the splendid saloons of Carlton House, feasting his eyes upon the forms of six charming creatures who were dancing in his presence.

Cheerful fires blazed in the two grates which heated the room, the light of broad day fell with a roseate tint through the heavy crimson curtains, and the atmosphere was warm and perfumed.

A beautiful young woman was seated at a piano, the strains of which she rendered appropriate to the complete pantomime of voluptuousness which the dancers were performing; for the melody was poured forth in soft transitions from the grave to the lively, from the energetic to the tender, according to the passions or sentiments portrayed by those witching English bayaderes.

Dressed in the gauzy garb of the ballet, that attire which although so scanty as to leave the form half-naked, is in itself so nearly transparent as to allow little scope for the exercise of the imagination with respect to those charms which it covers, the six dancing-girls had evidently been chosen on account of their superior fascinations to minister to the pleasures of the royal voluptuary.

As specimens of female loveliness they were perfect, glorious examples of woman's enchanting beauty, splendid models of all the outward graces and seductive charms of their sex. And as they were grouped together in the voluptuous dance which they were executing, it was impossible to be otherwise than ravished with the softness, smoothness, and polish of their forms, the gradual and easy transition

between all their contours, the harmony of the undulating lines which their busts, their figures, and their limbs presented in every view, the flexibility and grace which distinguished all their motions, and the breezing and floating appearance which they assumed in the performance of that pantomime of the passions.

Now did their eyes, speaking to the very soul of the prince, produce an effect as if a succession of dreamy and sensuous raptures were stealing slowly and softly upon him; then glances of passion, rapidly and fervently darted, sent a thrill of ecstasy through his heart. Now he experienced joyous moments of melting tenderness as they stretched out their white arms toward him, as if wooing him to their delicious embraces; then, as they gently and gradually assumed attitudes in which wantonness was exquisitely blended with the most seductive grace, he felt the blood course like lightning in its crimson channels and his passions were excited almost to a fever and a delirium.

Again, while the music pours forth its delicious melody, the dancers perform steps well calculated to show off their rounded yet elastic limbs, and rest for a few moments at a time in positions that display their symmetrical figures to the best advantage. Then from these attitudes of repose, so full of soft and voluptuous languor, they slowly melt, as it were, once more into the gentle undulations of a subdued, soft, and noiseless dance, depicting all the phases of love's passions and enjoyment by the sweet motion of the mouth, the eyes, the rounding arms, the arching neck, and the wavy, floating appearance of the figure. Thus, enchanting the mind and ravishing the senses, their graceful but voluptuous performance carried the soul through all the grades of sensuous emotion, through all the transitions of soft excitement, and through all the phases of impassioned rapture.

For these six beauteous votaries of the Terpsichorean art appealed to the sense rather than broke abruptly upon it, insinuated the soft witchery of their own loveliness and the magic tenderness of their performance, rather than excited the passions all in a moment; and in the same way that a liquid and silver voice steals deliciously upon the ear, while a shrill exclamation would only startle and annoy, so did the united charms of the dancers and their dance gradually

enthral the feelings of the prince in the bliss of an Elysian dream.

He beheld before him no unfeminine vaulting, no childish spinning and whirling with lightning speed, no uncouth distortion of limb threatening dislocation, and producing an unpleasant effect upon the spectator; but all was softness of motion, gentleness of undulation, and gracefulness of attitude, as if a melting poesy and a flowing rhythm were applied to gesture in order to express the warmth of sentiment, the sunny glow of passion, and the fervid rapture of ecstatic enjoyment.

By thus avoiding all rapid, thrilling, and exhausting successions of violent action, the six dancers were enabled to throw a profoundly sensual and deliciously seductive power alike into their countenances and their movements; so that now their eyes swam in liquid wantonness as by their attitudes they permitted the licentious looks of the prince to feast upon their swelling bosoms; then, ere his gaze was even half-satiated, they resumed the slow and undulating movements which displayed the finished form of their limbs and the rich contours of their fine persons. Now they would pause again to exhibit their capacity for grace of attitude; then, gently awakening into life again, they produced an effect as of harmonious feelings in the mind, apart from the real music which stole in all the soft richness of the piano's melody upon the ear.

Not only was there grace in the performance of the dancers, but likewise intellectuality and refinement. In depicting the feelings and tender delights of love, they put forth all their most seducing power and gave a new charm to every attitude of the body, every movement of the limbs, and every expression of the countenance. Juvenile lightness and freshness were subdued into a soft sensuousness that appealed to the imagination, enabling it not only to feast itself upon the charms which were exposed, but likewise to revel in the beauties that were hidden.

And, oh, the licentious prince both feasted his eyes and revelled in the spectacle thus provided for his morning's diversion; and when he was actually surfeited with the excess of that bliss which his prurient imagination had conjured up, he bade the music and the dancing cease, in order that the young females might congregate around him and enhance

by means of sparkling champagne the excitement to which the general feeling was already worked up.

And now, even at this early hour, commenced a revel in which the heir apparent to the British throne was the hero, and a bevy of ballet-girls the heroines, — a revel in which he laid aside all the little dignity which his mind possessed, and they forgot all the trifling amount of modesty which a profligate career had left them.

With one of these charming sirens upon each knee, the Prince of Wales gave unbridled license to his tongue; and the conversation which ensued would have disgraced a brothel. The champagne flowed freely; and the more frequent grew the libations, the more unblushingly was the disguise of language torn from the lascivious ideas which circulated as unrestrainedly as the wine. The prince pressed his lips, hot with the breath of lust, to the rich red mouths that were moistened with the generous juice of the grape; and on his fevered brow and burning cheeks those courtesans of the opera imprinted their harlot kisses.

Presently the musician, obedient to a signal which he gave her, returned to the piano; and while the glorious instrument was made to desecrate itself by pouring forth its rich strains in a libidinous measure, the dancing-girls united their voices in the obscene air to which it belonged.

The orgy was thus at its height, and the Prince of Wales was joining in the ribald song, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and a page announced, "The king!"

Heavens! what a scene of confusion instantaneously followed, and what a spectacle was this to greet the eyes of a monarch and a father!

The musician sprang, with a shriek, from the piano, the two girls started with responsive screams from the knees of the prince, the rest fluttered around the table, not knowing how to act and wishing the floor would open and swallow them up. Here a champagne-glass was dropped and broken, there a bottle was overturned with a clattering din, and a fruit-dish, being upset in the hurry and bewilderment of the scene, scattered its contents upon the floor.

King George III stood aghast. The consternation of mingled horror and amazement was expressed upon his naturally stolid countenance, his hands were spread out fanlike from his wrists, his eyeballs glared wildly, and his whole at-

titude was so absurd in its indignation, that, were he not the British sovereign, he would have been saluted with peals of laughter instead of received with looks of dismay.

The Prince of Wales was for a few moments so astounded by this sudden apparition of his august father that he remained transfixed to his seat, staring vacantly upon him; but suddenly recovering some portion of his presence of mind, he started up and waved his hand imperiously to the ballet-girls to withdraw. This tacit but unmistakable command recalled them also from their bewilderment and confusion; and, as if seized with a panic terror, they rushed toward the door communicating with an inner room, their gauze drapery fluttering airily, their supple and exquisitely formed limbs moving glancingly, and the nymphlike lightness of their forms acquiring a soaring appearance, as they fled, or rather flew, like a bevy of affrighted fairies from the presence of some uncouth mortal who had intruded upon their sacred retreat.

The apartment was thus cleared of the courtesans of the opera, and the Prince of Wales found himself alone with the king; for the page who escorted his Majesty thither had prudently retired the moment he caught a glimpse of the aspect of affairs.

Covered with shame, half-tipsy with the generous juice of Épernay which he had imbibed, and not knowing whether to assume an air of contrition or defiance, the Prince of Wales stood balancing himself by holding on to the back of the chair whence he had risen, and gazing vacantly on the countenance of the king, who was looking fully as stupidly at him.

"Dreadful — horrible — dreadful!" at length ejaculated the monarch. "I couldn't have believed it, George, I couldn't have believed it. Knew you were wild, but didn't think you were so bad as this; no, didn't think it for a moment. Wouldn't have believed it if any one had told me so. But I can't stop in this room, no, not in this room. It smells of wine and orgies, and drunken dissipation, and all that kind of thing. Come, sir, lead me elsewhere, that I may speak a few words without having my nose offended — nose offended," reiterated his Majesty, applying his forefinger and thumb to his nasal promontory and holding the tip with an expression of deep disgust.

"Be pleased to walk this way, Sire," said the Prince of

Wales, endeavouring with all his might to steady both his legs and his ideas; but, feeling that he was scarcely able to keep upon the former and that the latter were whirling in chaotic confusion, he muttered to himself, as he threw open the door by which the king had originally entered the room, "It's no use — I'm as drunk as damnation!"

"Eh! — what? what?" ejaculated his Majesty, turning sharply and suddenly around just as he was crossing the threshold. "What was that you said, sir, eh?"

"I ventured to observe, Sire," answered the prince, endeavouring to look as sober as he could, "that our little revel deserves some extenuation."

"Ah! ah! yes, I caught the 'ation,'" cried the king, looking his son very hard in the face; "but I thought that it formed part of some other word. Well, and what excuse have you, eh? What excuse —"

"Simply, most revered Sire," returned the prince, assuming all the vacant gravity of semi-intoxication, "simply that those young ladies had come to sing 'God Save the King!' which we were indeed practising at the moment when your Majesty broke in upon us; and the words of the national anthem — hic — had filled us so full of loyalty that we were obliged to drink your Majesty's health in bumpers."

"Hem! well, it may be so, it may be so," said the king, surveying the prince suspiciously; "and I hope it is, for your sake. But when I think of it, how was it that two of the girls were seated on your knees, sir — seated on your knees, eh?"

"Oh, may it please your Majesty, that was to show me how to beat time accurately," replied the Prince of Wales.

"Beat fiddlestick!" exclaimed the king; but not choosing to prolong this portion of the discourse, he hurried from the apartment where the orgy had taken place and accompanied his scapegrace son to another room in the splendid mansion.

Gazing around him as he took the seat which the prince officially placed for his accommodation, the king's eye was speedily offended by certain pictures and statues which ornamented the apartment, and which, without being absolutely indelicate, might certainly have been more decent.

"Heyday!" exclaimed his Majesty; "am I in Carlton House, or in a luxurious brothel? 'Pon my word, George,

your taste is very vicious, very vicious indeed. What means that naked woman there in the great picture between the windows, eh, sir? Come, speak!"

"It is Venus rising from the ocean, my dear father," answered the Prince of Wales; "and it is considered a perfect masterpiece."

"Masterpiece, indeed! Master fiddlestick!" exclaimed his Majesty. "But there's another, more indelicate still —"

"Helen and Paris, Sire," said the prince, explaining the subject of this second picture against which the king levelled his objections. "Really your Majesty must be aware — hic — that there's nothing indecent or improper in the ancient classics, any more than there is in the Bible. Boys at school read about Jupiter's amours with Europa, and Semele, and Leda, just the same as both boys and girls read the story of Lot and his daughters in the Old Testament —"

"Silence, sirrah! silence!" ejaculated the king, his puffy cheeks flushing with anger. "I know that you are a voluptuary, a seducer, a gambler, a spendthrift, and a drunkard; but I hope that you are not an infidel likewise."

"Upon my word," said the prince, his own countenance glowing with a crimson deeper than even that which the wine had painted upon it, "your Majesty is highly complimentary. This is the first time your Majesty has deigned for some years to set foot within my humble dwelling; and if your Majesty has nothing more pleasing to communicate than to call me a parcel of hard names, I hope that your Majesty's visits will henceforth cease altogether."

"Eh? — what — what? This to me!" ejaculated the monarch, starting from his seat, and surveying his son with mingled amazement and anger.

"To you, or to any one else who unprovokedly insults me," said the Prince of Wales, with that dogged, sullen firmness which so frequently characterizes a state of semi-ebriety..

"I give you two minutes to withdraw your expressions, sirrah," exclaimed the king.

"I wouldn't give two damns to withdraw them at all," observed the prince, flinging upon his father a look of mingled defiance and contempt.

"You will repent of this when you're sober, sir, you'll

repent of it, I tell you," cried the king, profoundly irritated. "Such ingratitude, after all I've done for you —"

"All you've done for me!" echoed his Royal Highness, drawing himself up to his full height and becoming almost completely sobered by the reflections which that reproach forced upon his mind. "Let us examine for an instant all the wonderful obligations under which I lie toward your Majesty. In the first place, my debts have been paid several times, it is true: but with what?"

"With what?" exclaimed George III. "Why, with money, to be sure."

"Yes, the people's money," retorted the prince. "Not yours, — you haven't a farthing of your own in the whole world. It is all very well out-of-doors to let the world and the newspapers talk of the sovereign's bounty, and such like nonsense; the throne can only be sustained by humbug of that kind. But, indoors, between you and me, my dear father," added the prince, with a tone and manner of bitter satire, "there cannot be a more miserable mockery than for you to vapour and boast of giving away the coin wrung from the very vitals of an overtaxed, oppressed, and wonderfully enduring nation. So much for the money part of the question. As for the moral —"

"Do you mean to affirm, sirrah," exclaimed his Majesty, foaming with rage, "that I have ever set you a bad example?"

"I cannot say that your Majesty has done that," returned the prince; "but this I will proclaim, that my education was as wretchedly narrow, defective, and circumscribed —"

"Enough! enough!" cried the king. "We shall have you announcing yourself as a republican next, and throwing off all allegiance —"

"By Heaven! if every one in the country knew as much of the humbug of monarchy as you and I, my dear father," exclaimed the Prince of Wales, "there would be nothing else but republicans. But there's no fear of my proclaiming myself a democrat. No, no; I wish to reign as a king, I mean to reign as a king, and I will show the English people that I look upon them as having been made to become the slaves and ministers of my pleasures. Yes, since they will have kings, by Heaven! they shall have a true king in me, —

one who will grind them down with taxes, trample upon them, spurn them, treat them as lickspittles and menials."

"You are my own son, after all," exclaimed his Majesty, considerably softened by these evidences of a due appreciation of regal duties and royal attributes. "The people must be coerced, never conciliated. Once grant them an inch, and they will soon require an ell. If they ask for reform, give them grape-shot; if they meet to demand a redress of grievances, disperse them at the point of the bayonet. The idea that a sovereign can reign in the hearts of his people is nonsense. He is their natural oppressor; and they can only be ruled by being made to regard the throne as something powerful, grand, awe-inspiring, and terrible. A madman alone would preach the possibility of making it lovable."

And, gasping with the exertion of having thus made one of the only connected and fluent speeches which he ever delivered in his life, the king resumed the seat whence he had started in a rage a few minutes previously.

"Well," said the Prince of Wales, "I am delighted to think that the little breeze which just now arose between us has lulled into a calm. The truth is, my dear father, I have the highest respect for you when you don't call me names; because there's something particularly ignominious in applying harsh terms to the heir apparent to the throne. Moreover, at this present instant I have some claims on your Majesty's favour and consideration, inasmuch as I have consented to give my hand to Caroline of Brunswick, and have already sent Mrs. Fitzherbert about her business."

"Then it is true that this lady has left you?" interrupted George III, joyfully. "Well, I'm glad of it. Very beautiful, no doubt, but a Catholic, George, a Catholic! Always remember to keep up the idea that this is a Protestant throne—Protestant throne. 'Tis the only safeguard of the House of Hanover, mind that! But what were we talking about? Oh, Mrs. Fitzherbert. Well, you've got rid of her, and I congratulate you. Your mother congratulates you, too; she is well pleased, very well pleased. Pitt told us of it a day or two ago, and that is what induced me to visit you personally this morning. While Mrs. Fitzherbert was beneath your roof, I could not cross the threshold. But now circumstances are altered,

much altered. When I came just now, — quite *incog.*, mind, — I would not allow myself to be introduced with any state or ceremony. ‘Conduct me direct,’ I said, ‘into the presence of the prince,’ and I was thinking what a joyful surprise it would be for you, when that lewd scene burst upon my eyes. Oh, fie, George, I am sorry to have received such evidence — unmistakable evidence — of the vicious courses which you pursue.”

“Are we to return, Sire, to unpleasant subjects?” demanded his Royal Highness, in a cold tone.

“Eh! — what? Unpleasant subjects!” echoed his Majesty. “No, certainly not, very far from it. Come, there’s my hand, George, let the past be forgotten, quite forgotten. I won’t even reproach you for all that took place at the castle the other day, when your friend Beagles or Deagles — ”

“Meagles,” correctively suggested the prince.

“Well, Meagles, then, Meagles — Meagles,” reiterated his Majesty; “but, as I was saying, we won’t even touch upon that topic. We will turn over a new leaf, a new leaf, an entirely new leaf. You’re going to be married, and you must become steady. And to show you that you really have an indulgent father, in spite of — But no matter, let bygones be bygones. I was about to observe, to convince you that I will do all I can to please you when you merit my favour, that in the course of three or four days Mr. Clarendon will receive an intimation — ”

“Ah! I am glad that this affair has not been neglected!” exclaimed the prince.

“Neglected, no!” cried his Majesty. “I passed my word to your friend Mr. Meagles — Meagles — Meagles,” reiterated the king, dwelling with a species of childish pleasure upon the name. “Let me see, to-day’s Wednesday — Wednesday. Well, next Saturday — but not before, mind — you may cause it to be intimated to Mr. Clarendon that the offer of a peerage and a pension which he will receive on that same morning is a consideration — ”

“I understand you, my dear father, and I thank you,” interrupted his Royal Highness. “Shall I now order luncheon to be served up?” he asked, by way of putting an end to a conversation which was growing especially tedious to him.

“No, I must take my departure,” responded the king,

rising from his seat. "And now, my dear son," he added, his voice suddenly assuming a solemn tone, "let me beseech you to be circumspect in your conduct. You are about to enter the matrimonial sphere, and the eyes of the nation are upon you. Lord Malmesbury is about to set off for Germany in order to escort the Princess Caroline to England. The portrait of her Serene Highness will be sent to you in a few days —"

"My dear father, I beg of you to abandon this topic, at least for the present," interrupted the Prince of Wales, with an emphasis that was marked and resolute even to sternness. "Were the Princess Caroline of Brunswick as beautiful as an angel, I could not look upon myself in any other light than as a man sacrificed to the most deplorable exigencies. My debts, the cruel necessity of a prince of the blood espousing a foreign princess, instead of a British subject, and the circumstance that this alliance is a merely conventional one in which the hands and not the hearts are joined, — all these circumstances afflict me cruelly. Indeed, I cannot bear to think of the marriage which has been planned for me, and there are times when I recoil from the idea as if it were a hideous spectre haunting my imagination. I consent to the sacrifice," added his Royal Highness, laconically; "but let us not talk of it."

"Be it as you will, my dear son," observed his Majesty; and, wringing the prince's hand with some degree of emotion, he took his departure without uttering another word.

The Prince of Wales paced the room in an agitated manner for some minutes after his royal father had left him; then, suddenly making a strong effort to throw off the gloomy ideas which had stolen upon him, he rang the bell violently.

Germain, the faithful and discreet French valet, instantly answered the summons.

"Are the ballet-dancers gone?" demanded the prince.

"They departed immediately after the arrival of his Majesty," was the response.

"I am sorry for that," muttered the heir apparent to himself; "their presence would have banished the care which now weighs, I know not why, upon my soul."

"May it please your Royal Highness," said Germain, "a young lady, whom I have shown to the red drawing-room, solicits an interview."

"A young lady!" echoed the prince. "Of course she gave you her name?"

The valet handed his master a card.

"Miss Clarendon!" exclaimed the heir apparent, glancing at the name which it bore. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he said, "Hasten and announce that I will be with her in ten minutes."

CHAPTER XLIII

THE VICTIM OF THE ROYAL LOVER

THE Prince of Wales repaired to his own private apartment, where he at once adopted the most approved measures to restore himself to a state of complete sobriety; for it struck him as something criminal, indeed, he reflected that it would be adding a flagrant insult to an irreparable injury, were he to appear half-intoxicated in the presence of that wronged and beauteous creature whose image still retained a certain influence over his heart.

Having drunk a bottle of soda-water, he twisted a wet towel around his head, and then entered the warm bath. Issuing thence considerably refreshed, he summoned Germain, and by the aid of this skilful dependent, soon completed his toilet.

His countenance was slightly flushed, but it seemed rather the animation of mental excitement than the effects of wine; and though his brain still felt somewhat heated, he did not regret this circumstance, inasmuch as it inspired him with a bastard courage to encounter the lovely girl whom he had undone.

Taking a last look at himself in the full-length mirror, and feeling well satisfied with his appearance, the Prince of Wales repaired slowly to the drawing-room to which Octavia had been shown. Yes, slowly did he proceed thither; for, in spite of the feverish hardihood that animated him, he experienced a certain dread, as if his soul quailed and his heart quaked at the idea of in a few moments finding himself face to face with the confiding young woman whom he had made the victim of so black a treachery.

But at length he reached the door. For a few moments he hesitated to open it. What could he say in justification

of his conduct? What hope could he give her? How were they to meet, and how were they to part? Would she use menaces with the view of coercing, or prayers for the purpose of melting his soul? It was impossible to say; conjecture was defied, the imagination was set at nought on all those points, and even while the Prince of Wales thus tarried a quarter of a minute at the door, his suspense became aroused to an almost torturing degree.

With a desperate effort over his apprehensions, he entered the room; and, closing the door carefully behind him, he advanced toward the place where Octavia Clarendon was seated.

Her face was not immediately turned toward him; it was averted, and her head was bent downward. His eyes swept her form, the attitude of which indicated a profound grief; and a sharp pang, the sudden paroxysm of remorse, shot through the heart of the prince with the lancinating effect of a barbed arrow. He stood still at the distance of a dozen paces from his victim, and he contemplated the exquisite beauty of her figure with looks, not of lust, but of compassion. Slowly she turned her head; her eyes met his, her countenance was revealed to him, not in the radiant glory of those sunny smiles which were wont to greet him, but with an expression so full of sorrow, so woebegone, that the adder of remorse inflicted a deeper and sharper sting upon his soul.

"Dearest Octavia," he said, hastening toward her and throwing himself upon his knees at her feet, "I know that you mean to upbraid me, I know that I merit your reproaches. But is there no chance of forgiveness, no hope of pardon?" he asked, in a voice that was deep and tremulous, as if moved by the saddest music that ever hymned the dirge of passion in the human soul.

"O God! what reply can I make?" ejaculated Octavia, suddenly wringing her hands in a paroxysm of ineffable anguish. "I came to say so many things to you, and now that I am here, all my thoughts have fallen into confusion."

"Sweetest, dearest girl, compose yourself and hear me patiently," said the prince, seizing her hands and covering them with kisses as he still knelt at her feet. "I shall not seek to justify myself, Octavia," he continued; "for I know that I have wronged you, cruelly wronged you. But I am

not the villain you may be inclined to deem me. Dazzled by your beauty, maddened by the contemplation of your image, I was not master of myself. Had Satan stood before me and demanded my soul as the price of his services in rendering me the possessor of your charms, I should have yielded an assent. Yes, I, who shall one day be King of England, would have sold myself, Octavia, to the king of hell for your sake."

"Great Heaven! talk not thus, George," exclaimed the affrighted girl, her whole frame quivering and shuddering at the awful emphasis which her seducer gave to his impiety. "It is true, then, that you did love me?"

"Love you, Octavia!" ejaculated the prince, again pressing to his burning lips those fair hands which were not withdrawn. "Oh, how can you ask me whether I did love you, when I love you now, yes, at present, more devotedly, more enthusiastically than ever. The love that I bear for you, Octavia, is imperishable. The cruel mandates of an absolute sire and a tyrannical Ministry may compel me to bestow my hand upon another, but my heart will ever be thine. The mystic fires of passion burn at this moment in my soul with as strong a fervour as when I received the first virgin kiss from your lips. Possession has not deadened that warmth nor mitigated that glow, and the flame will burn on unquenchably until the end. For now my cheek mantles and my heart throbs as heretofore, when I press your dear hands to my lips; and your forgiveness for the past and promise of continued love for the future would be the crowning joy of my life, the consummation of all my earthly hope."

"By everything sacred," exclaimed Octavia, her countenance becoming even wild in its expression, the result of emotions tensely wrung and of feelings painfully overwrought, "by everything sacred, I adjure you not to address me any more in the language of love. O God! my brain whirls, my temples burn as if through the torture of unspeakable anguish; my heart suffers the crucifixion of despair. To know that you love me, yet be unable to enjoy your love, to hear you breathe the fondest assurance in my ears, yet feel that it were a crime to give back the glowing pledges, oh, it is maddening, maddening!"

And, snatching, tearing her hands away from the clasp in which his Royal Highness sought to retain them, she

covered her face therewith; and the pearly tears streamed in showers between the taper fingers.

"Octavia, my beloved Octavia," exclaimed the prince, pressing her knees in an anguish which was indeed unfeigned, "subdue this terrible grief, strive to recover some degree of tranquillity, yield not thus to the wildness of sorrow."

"Alas! alas! with what hope can I console myself?" cried the wretched girl, removing her hands from her countenance and bending upon her lover looks which bespoke almost a mental aberration, so terrible was her despair. "If you had told me that you loved me no longer, if you had confessed that my image dwelt no longer in your heart, I should have been less afflicted. Your neglect, your indifference, your faithlessness would have inspired me with other sentiments, more fierce and wild than poignant. But to know, to see, to feel that you do love me, George, to think how happy we might have been, were you only a humble gentleman, or I a princess, to reflect, in fine, that no earthly felicity could have compared with ours had circumstances permitted our hands to join at the altar of God, — oh, it is this, it is this that maddens me, it is this that falls upon my brain like drops of molten lead, it is this that penetrates like red-hot iron into my heart's core. Yes, the dream of love is gone, the morning of stern and terrible reality has dawned on that deep night of passion which was so delicious in its mystery. The clouds are dispersed, and the light which truth sheds at length is reflected from a broken heart."

And again the wretched girl gave way to the violence of a rending, tearing anguish.

The prince sprang from his knees, threw his arms around her, drew her toward him, strained her to his breast, and poured into her ears all the language of consolation which the eloquence of a real and unfeigned grief could suggest. For this man, usually so cold-blooded, so selfish, and so callous, this hardened voluptuary who had scarcely experienced a pang when he allowed his myrmidon to drive Mrs. Fitzherbert from his palatial mansion, this profligate, whose whole life was one monstrous egotism, felt his soul touched and his heart subdued by the piteous spectacle of that fair young creature's excruciating woe.

Yes, he strained her to his breast; and for a few minutes she abandoned herself so entirely to him that those caresses

which he at first lavished upon her through the tenderest compassion began to acquire the fervour of other and less chastened feelings. But, the instant that this fact burst upon her comprehension, Octavia started from his arms, tore herself from his embrace, and, while her countenance became scarlet, her bosom palpitated, and her whole manner evinced a profound, angry agitation, she exclaimed, "My heart is breaking, George, but let me die cherishing the thought that you have loved me not with a dishonouring passion, although dishonour has been my portion."

And, retreating a few paces from the chair which she had left, Octavia sank upon another seat.

Her bonnet had fallen off in the half-struggle which had taken place when she thus wrested herself from the arms of the prince; and that splendid flood of auburn hair which might have formed the glory of a princess adored and worshipped as Tasso's Leonora rolled in heavy and shining masses over her shoulders. The sunbeams, penetrating between the rich curtains that shaded the windows, appeared to mingle with those luxuriant tresses, imparting to them so fine a gloss and so golden a magnificence that the head of the fair being seemed radiant as that of an angel. Alas! alas! though the glory still circled the brow, yet was the angel fallen; and though heaven's own blessed light still shone around the head, yet had the heart changed into the dross of earth. The serpent had looked in upon the Eden of her heart, had found its flowers rich in perfume and bright in hue, and had changed that fair paradise into desolation. The tempter had taught her to contemplate love as the rose of the soul; she had plucked it from its stem, she had pressed it to her bosom, and the hidden thorn had pierced deep into her heart.

And now, as the prince gazed upon her, while she arranged that flood of glorious hair which swept over her shoulders, he felt that he could not lose a mistress so transcendently beautiful; nay, he even felt that he loved her more than he had ever yet loved a woman in all his life.

"Octavia, sweet Octavia," he said, after a long pause, and, as he spoke, he gradually advanced close up to her, "talk not of a breaking heart, I implore you. There are two persons in this room, and think you that there is only one heart which is afflicted? By Heavens, you do me an injus-

tice!" he exclaimed, in an impassioned tone, as he seized Octavia's right hand and clasped it forcibly.

"Oh, your sufferings, George, are light and tolerable indeed when compared with mine," said the unhappy girl, with an expression of hopeless misery in her deep blue eyes and on her exquisitely chiseled lip. "When affliction falls upon the heads of two persons who love tenderly, 'tis the fate of the weaker to bear the heavier load; and if the sacrifice of a broken heart be demanded, 'tis poor woman's invariable doom to become the victim. Yes, all the wretchedness as well as all the dishonour must be borne by her. Blasted with the lightnings of her passion, she is stricken into an early grave. Oh, these are truths to which man cannot close his eyes," exclaimed Octavia, with an agonized intonation that betrayed all the poignancy of her anguish; "and yet does he persecute woman with his unlawful love. Why did you make me your victim?" she demanded, with an abruptness that was wild and almost fierce. "Wherefore did you pour into my soul the poison of your own passion? You found me gay, and happy, and smiling, contented and innocent, an untutored creature seeking not the terrible experience of love; and what have you made me? To what have you reduced me? Where is the hope of my youth? Shivered, like glass, into a thousand pieces that now reflect, whichever way I turn, the hideous image of despair. Restore me to that pedestal of innocence whence you have dragged me down, give me back mine honour! You are a prince, the son of a king, one day to be a king yourself, and you have power to do more than ordinary mortals; else is your rank a mockery, your might a delusion. Prove yourself as great as the world believes you to be," exclaimed the wretched girl, starting from her seat, half-maddened by the excitement of her overwrought feelings; "release me from the spells wherewith you have enchanted me, raise the terrible incantation that rests upon me —"

"Octavia, Octavia!" cried the prince, in a tone which appeared to have caught the infection of her wildness, for the fear that her senses were abandoning her had driven him almost to despair, "I implore you, by everything sacred, I conjure you to tranquillize yourself."

"Oh, 'tis so easy for you to preach tranquillity," she exclaimed bitterly, "you who suffer so lightly. But the time

may come, however," she added, with a strange abruptness and an expression of countenance that seriously alarmed the prince, "the time may come when remorse shall touch your soul, when the worm of compunction shall gnaw your heart; and then, although your sovereign rank may gild your agonies, yet shall the memory of the poor girl whose love you won and whose heart you broke return again and again to torture you when stretched upon a restless couch you court slumber in vain, and when no eye sees you save His from whose presence no man can fly."

"Octavia! you are killing yourself with excitement," cried the prince; "and you are driving me to desperation. What means this change of humour? Why reproach me now? Scarcely ten minutes have elapsed since you were almost happy in the conviction that my heart is thine, indissolubly thine."

"No, no, I was not happy," she exclaimed, struggling to release her hands from the grasp in which her royal lover again held them. "And if I were, it was criminal on my part to be so. For new ideas spring up every moment in my mind, new intuitions give an impulse to my thoughts. The walls of this room are dissolving into thin air," she continued, stretching out her arms wildly and glaring with terrible excitement around; "the world without becomes revealed to me, the whole earth develops itself to my experience, the human heart is opened to my penetration —"

"Merciful God, she is raving!" cried the prince, gazing upon Octavia Clarendon with looks wherein anguish was blended with terror and dismay.

"Nothing now is unknown to me, not a secret is hidden," she continued, with rapid utterance and fierce gesticulation, while her hair, dishevelled again and flowing over her shoulders, gave her the air of a pythoness. "A film has fallen from my eyes, a veil has been withdrawn from my mind. I can read my own heart, and I understand yours. I am the victim, and you triumph —"

"Octavia, Octavia!" ejaculated the prince, seizing her in his arms and endeavouring to stifle her maniac words with kisses.

"Release me!" she screamed, struggling violently. "Your breath is hot, 'tis a serpent's venom —"

"Silence! in the name of God, silence!" cried his Royal

Highness, still retaining her in his arms. "You will alarm the house."

"I care not!" screamed the wretched girl. "Release me, I say."

"Suffer me to bear you to the sofa. Lie down and compose yourself."

"No, ten thousand times no!" she shrieked, her voice becoming frantic and her struggles desperate.

"My God! do you think that I will hurt you?" exclaimed the prince, driven to despair.

"Yes, you are a serpent, your coils environ me!" and a piercing, rending, thrilling scream burst from her lips, as she broke away from his Royal Highness.

Madly she rushed toward the door; it opened violently just as she was within three paces of it, and several of the prince's dependents burst into the room.

"Let me go! Let me pass!" shrieked Octavia, possessed by Heaven only knows what dreadful hallucination.

"Stop her!" thundered the prince. "I command you to stop her!"

The door was closed instantaneously, and Octavia was seized upon by the servants.

For a few moments she stood still and mute as a statue, and it seemed as if the large blue eyes that now gazed so vacantly upon his Royal Highness were fixed for ever; but the instant that he began to approach in order to soothe and tranquillize her, she gave a sudden start, burst from the dependents who held her, and threw up her arms wildly.

The menials seized upon her again; her countenance grew abruptly distorted with a frantic expression, and a terrible laugh which pealed from her lips spoke out the appalling truth.

Octavia Clarendon was a maniac!

CHAPTER XLIV

THE LOVES OF THE PRINCESSES

WHILE this painful scene was occurring at Carlton House, a conversation of an interesting character was taking place at Windsor Castle between two of the daughters of George III.

In a magnificently furnished apartment, about which were all the scattered evidences of female tastes, the Princesses Sophia and Amelia were seated together in a window recess. A shade of pensiveness was upon the countenance of each royal lady; and in the amiable spirit of sisterly reliance and confidence, they retained each other's hand in a fond clasp.

We have already described their personal appearance; and the reader is therefore aware that they possessed a beauty of no ordinary character. Complexions more dazzlingly fair, eyes more deliciously melting, charms more luxuriant and voluptuous, it would be impossible to conceive. They were the true types of the female portion of the family of Brunswick, precocious in the development of their forms, their countenances indicating the strength of the desires which warmed their bosoms, their lips especially evincing the sensuality of their temperament, and their eyes usually swimming in a soft languor, but susceptible of being lighted up with the fires of the most impassioned ardour.

Of the two, the Princess Sophia was more essentially gross in her feelings and more thoroughly sensuous in her longings than the Princess Amelia. To the former, love was a passion in which the appetite for gratification was stronger than the pure affection for the object; to the latter, it was a more sweet and agreeable emotion, though still voluptuous even in its refinement. But then the Princess Sophia had lost her chastity and had plunged headlong into the

enjoyments of fruition, whereas the Princess Amelia was still in the possession of her virgin innocence, although her imagination was inflamed even to pruriency.

And they both loved; yes, these royal ladies experienced the influence of the tender passion as well as the meanest of mortals, but less happy, less fortunate than even the humblest and lowest and poorest of the sons and daughters of toil, they knew that their hands could never be bestowed where their hearts had already been given.

But let us listen to the discourse which is now taking place between them, and we shall acquire a deeper insight into the secrets which, in the confidence of a true sisterly love, they were now revealing to each other.

"I am glad, my beloved Sophia," said the Princess Amelia, who was a year younger than her sister, "I am glad that some secret and unaccountable impulse prompted us to open our hearts to each other this morning."

"The impulse is not unaccountable," observed the Princess Sophia, in a soft and subdued tone. "The truth is, Amelia, we yearned to exchange a mutual confidence; we felt that it would relieve our minds of a weight were we to unbosom ourselves to each other, and we have acted in obedience to the inspiration."

"Yes, you have properly defined the motive which led to all that has this morning passed between us," returned the Princess Amelia. "Alas! my poor Sophia, you are far more unhappy than I, for he whom you love is already your husband in the sight of Heaven, and the father of your child —"

"Hush, dearest Amelia!" murmured the elder sister; "for Heaven's sake subdue your voice to the lowest possible whisper when you allude to that tremendous secret. Oh, with burning cheeks, with throbbing brows, and with palpitating heart, did I throw myself into your arms, my beloved Amelia, and breathe in your ear that fatal truth which involves alike my happiness and my honour. But I do not repent having revealed that secret to you — oh, no, my dearest sister, I do not repent, for you can now afford me your pity, your sympathy, and your consolation."

"And I do compassionate you, Sophia, profoundly compassionate you," said the Princess Amelia, flinging her robust white arms about her sister's neck and embracing her

affectionately. "In loving General Barth, you have bestowed your affections upon a man in every way worthy of them —"

"No, not in every way, Amelia," interrupted the elder sister, with an accent of bitterness marking the profound melancholy of her tone: "not in every way, for he is not a prince."

"Alas! is it not terrible that etiquette and cold formality should surround us as with a wall of adamant?" exclaimed the Princess Amelia. "Is it not unnatural that our passions and feelings, though the same as those which animate the humblest peasant, are to be curbed by laws and statutes? Marriage to us can never be associated with the heart's feelings; it must prove nothing more than a cold ceremony, a glacial convention resulting from expediency —"

"Marriage, my sweet sister, is with me impossible," interrupted the Princess Sophia, subduing a sob by a great effort. "Think you that situated as I am, being a mother, and with my secret known already to several persons, I should ever dare accompany a suitor to the altar? No, dearest Amelia, it is impossible; and if our parents should seek to dispose of my hand, I would rather throw myself at their feet and confess everything than allow them to confirm any matrimonial negotiation on my behalf. But you, Amelia, you may hope —"

"No, dearest Sophia," exclaimed the younger sister; "marriage likewise becomes impossible for me. I have already told you that I love Sir Richard Stamford, and I feel that my happiness is bound up in this passion which has obtained such speedy, prompt, and despotic empire over my soul. Only one week has elapsed since we first encountered each other under circumstances so strange, so remarkable; and since then we have met every day," added the princess, concealing her blushing countenance in Sophia's bosom. "His misfortunes had already engendered a profound sympathy in my heart, even before I ever beheld him; and I was therefore prepared to love him tenderly and well."

"And he knows not that you love him thus?" said the Princess Sophia, interrogatively.

"He may perhaps conjecture that such is the fact," answered Amelia; "but no avowal of the state of my

feelings has issued from my lips. Oh, no, it were indelicate in the extreme to give utterance to a word calculated to reveal all I experience for him. Our acquaintance has been so short, and he is so profoundly absorbed in the contemplation of those misfortunes which have fallen upon his head — ”

“ And yet he must conceive it to be strange that you have thus met him daily since the morning when you first became personally known to each other? ”

“ Alas! I am well aware that my conduct is imprudent in the extreme,” said the Princess Amelia, her superb bosom heaving with a profound sigh. “ Nay, more, he may even look upon it as unmaidenly, undignified, improper. But I must submit to any opinion which he may form, however derogatory, for I feel that I love him more than my own life. He is handsomer, if possible, than our eldest brother, whom he so much resembles; and his sorrows have invested his countenance with a shade of pensiveness which give an ineffable attraction to the perfect manly beauty of his features. His voice is soft and touching, without losing its proper masculine intonation; his form is finely proportioned; and his manners are more than polished and agreeable, they are absolutely winning. How, then, can I be blamed for loving one who is in every way so worthy of an attachment the most devoted, the most sincere, the most fervent that woman’s heart is capable of bestowing? ”

“ I do not blame you, my sweet sister,” murmured the Princess Sophia. “ Heaven knows that I have neither the inclination nor the right to reproach you. On the contrary, I deeply sympathize with you. But beware, Amelia, beware, dear girl,” continued the elder lady, now blushing deeply in her turn, “ lest your love betray you into frailty, and your lot should become as unhappy as mine.”

“ Sophia,” answered the young princess, in a tone so melting and tremulous that it was scarcely audible, “ I have reflected well upon all the probable consequences of this love which I have formed, and I am prepared to make any sacrifice and incur any risk rather than surrender an attachment in which my earthly happiness is so deeply involved. If my only chance of safety be in refusing to meet Sir Richard Stamford any more, assuredly I shall not adopt that course.”

"And yet you know not whether your love be reciprocated, my dearest sister?" observed the Princess Sophia, gazing fondly on the blushing countenance of the charming and infatuated Amelia.

"I have already told you," she replied, "that he is absorbed in the misfortunes which have overtaken him. But on each occasion that we meet, he listens with a more evident pleasure to the words of solace which I pour into his ears; he calls me his good genius, his kind angel; and he begins to acknowledge that there is yet hope for him in this world. Ah! my dearest Sophia, you must not suppose that this love of mine can fail to touch a reciprocal chord in his heart. He welcomes me as his consoler, he already looks upon me as his best and sincerest friend, and he assures me that his heart will ever cherish the most fervent gratitude. Oh, there is something sublimely interesting in those interviews which take place between us," exclaimed the impassioned and enthusiastic princess, her countenance glowing with animation and her eyes swimming in a liquid radiance.

"God grant that you may always speak of them in the same tone!" ejaculated the Princess Sophia. "But there are moments, dearest Amelia," she continued, her voice and manner suddenly assuming an ominous solemnity, "when I doubt the possibility of permanent happiness for any member of our family."

"Merciful Heaven!" cried the younger sister, a strong shudder convulsing her frame; "this is an echo of the same misgiving which has so often disturbed my own mind."

"And I fear that it is not altogether unfounded, Amelia," returned the Princess Sophia. "Our ancestors have been guilty of terrible crimes. The records of Hanover and Brunswick could make revelations that would cause the blood to run cold and the hair to bristle up in horror. The vengeance of Heaven is now falling upon the present generation of our race, and an appalling sense of this truth strikes upon my heart. Oh, the millions who worship royalty in this country little think how unenviable are often the feelings of those whom they thus blindly adore!" added the elder sister, with a bitterness which grated terribly upon the ears of the younger lady. "And do you know," she continued, sinking her voice to the lowest audible whisper, "that I have latterly experienced devouring terrors lest that dreadful affliction —"

"Oh, our dear father's malady," interrupted the Princess Amelia, with a still more visible shudder than before; and then there was a long pause, during which these two young and royal ladies looked upon each other in dark and sinister silence.

"But let us not think of this, let us not meet misfortunes half-way," suddenly exclaimed the Princess Sophia. "God, who can afflict, knows likewise how to spare, and His chastisements seldom fall upon the innocent. If our father be undeserving of His wrath, he will perhaps escape a repetition of those trials to which Heaven has already subjected him; but if he also be criminal in any respect, then may his punishment begin, or rather continue, in this world."

"Oh, let us change the conversation," cried the Princess Amelia, to whose memory rushed all the incidents of that morning when the king was compelled to yield to the demands made upon him by Meagles and the Amazon.

We should, however, observe that the favourite daughter of George III had not breathed to a soul a single syllable of what she overheard on that occasion; no, not even to her sister Sophia had she revealed the strange, ominous, and mysterious events which had thus come to her knowledge. For, although she might unbosom the sentiments and the secrets of her own soul, yet everything regarding her sire she looked upon as solemn and sacred; and thus the Princess Sophia remained in complete ignorance of those circumstances of which the Princess Amelia had become cognizant, and which proved that some tremendous secret was associated with the destiny of England's king.

Rising from the window recess where they had remained for some time seated, and where the confidential outpourings of their hearts' mysteries had taken place, the royal sisters looked forth from the casement upon the vast range of park and pleasure-ground stretching before them.

"It is now midday," observed the Princess Sophia, after a long silence; and, bending her eyes significantly on the blushing countenance of her sister, she said, "Do not remain here, Amelia, only for the purpose of keeping me company. I know, from all you have told me this morning, that the hour is now at hand when some one will be expecting to meet you yonder."

"Such is indeed the truth, dearest sister," murmured the

younger lady, a sigh of pleasure escaping from her lips. "But you, my beloved Sophia," she exclaimed, a sudden thought striking her, "have you no hope of soon beholding again the object of your affection?"

"Yes," answered the elder princess; "a letter which I received yesterday tells me that General Barth will be in London in the course of next week, and I shall then return to St. James's palace."

"Will he not ask to be allowed to embrace his child?" inquired the Princess Amelia, gazing tenderly up into her sister's countenance.

"No, for that child can never be recognized by either of its parents," was the melancholy response.

Amelia pressed Sophia's hand in token of the sincerest sympathy, and then hurried from the apartment.

CHAPTER XLV

A BRITISH WORKING MAN AND HIS FAMILY

WE must now return to Camilla Morton, or rather Rose Foster; for the reader is doubtless well aware that the orphan girl had entered Mrs. Brace's establishment under the former name, which she had assumed for the reasons set forth in the letter that she had addressed to Tim Meagles.

A week had elapsed since we saw her hurrying madly along, in that vile neighbourhood which lies in the immediate vicinity of Westminster Abbey; and it will be recollected that we left her at the moment when, a vertigo seizing upon her, she sank deprived of sense upon the door-step of a house.

And where do we find her now? Let us endeavour to depict a scene which, full of harrowing details though it were, was but the type of thousands of such spectacles existing then, and of myriads existing at the present day.

In a wretched garret a small family was grouped in all those unstudied but painful attitudes which denote misery and despair.

A man, belonging to the industrious class, was seated upon a broken chair; and every lineament of a countenance naturally good-looking, but awful care-worn, evinced the ravages of famine and the poignancy of acute mental anguish. His form, strongly built when in vigorous health, was so wasted that his poverty-stricken clothing hung loosely upon him, thus rendering him a ghastly object, piteous indeed to contemplate; for it was a being made in the image of God who was thus reduced by destitution and want and sorrow to that lamentable condition in which he appeared to be dying by inches.

In another part of the wretched room, a woman was

suckling a babe. Suckling! No, no, that is not the term; for the fountain of her infant's life was dried up in her bosom, and the child was pulling feebly at a withered breast. O God! what language can convey an idea of the shocking appearance of that poor mother and her innocent babe? Emaciated were they both, so emaciated that the woman seemed but the shadow of what her former self must have been, and the child lay with the lightness of a feather on her thin, fleshless arm. Her cheeks were sunken and of corpselike paleness; her eyes were hollow, with large blue circles about them; the colour had even fled from her lips, leaving them white as if death had imprinted upon them the cold kiss of the tomb; and her entire appearance was so wan, so woebegone, so full of despair, that it seemed as if misery had taken a human shape and had become personified in her.

The babe, the poor babe over which she bent, was about nine or ten months old; but it scarcely appeared to have numbered as many weeks. The little being was so emaciated as to be only skin and bone, and instead of having that roundness of face which usually characterizes even the infant of tenderest age, its cheeks were as sunken as those of its mother. There was no vivacity in it, scarcely any motion. Dull and quiet it lay, not turning its head around every now and then at the sounds of voices, and never once experiencing the sunlight of a smile to break upon the frozen winter of its sad and cheerless infancy.

And as the starving mother bent over the famished babe, an expression of such rending despair would sweep from time to time athwart her countenance that, although her lips were silent, it was easy to read upon her features the words of agony which she kept repeating in the depths of her heart, "Holy God! what will become of thee, poor, helpless child?"

Near her was a little boy of about eight years old, and with a countenance that was intended by nature to be round, ruddy, and laughing in expression. But, merciful Heaven! how spirit-broken, how thin, how tortured with hunger, and how wretched he looked! Languid, exhausted, with hollow eyes in which starvation's demon glared, and shivering in the scanty clothes that hung loosely on his wasted frame, the little fellow presented a spectacle that would have drawn

tears from a being of even iron heart, ay, from the eyes of any one save a king, a queen, an aristocrat, or a poor law commissioner.

Upon the floor of this wretched garret, another boy, about thirteen years of age, was seated, endeavouring to soothe to the best of his ability a young sister who was between six and seven. The miserable girl was crying for bread; and her brother, as famished as herself, was whispering in her ear all the fondest assurances and the brightest hopes his fancy could conjure up, but the realization of which he was quite old and experienced enough to doubt in the blank bitterness of his own despair.

And, leaning against the wall, pressing her hand to her throbbing, burning brow, Rose Foster was endeavouring to steady those thoughts which were excited to an agonizing pitch by the contemplation of the appalling scene of misery that was before her eyes, and in which she also shared.

The man whom we have already represented as being seated in an attitude of despair was the head of this starving family whom we have described. The emaciated woman was his wife, the famishing children were his own. His name was Melmoth; and he was by trade a journeyman hatter. But having, at a public meeting of operatives, dared to express his political opinions with a frankness displeasing to the upholders of all the atrocious abuses which render this country a shame and a scandal in the history of civilization, he was immediately signalized as a victim. The clergyman of the parish denounced him as a "seditious fellow," and his employer turned him adrift at a short notice. Vainly did he apply for work elsewhere: his name was known in connection with democratic sentiments, and, because he was independent enough to express what he thought and felt, starvation became his doom in this land which boasts its freedom, its intelligence, and its charity.

Such was the origin of Melmoth's misfortunes. Months had passed since the ban of a selfish and vitiated society had thus been placed upon him; and, although bearing an unblemished character for sobriety, honesty, and ability in his craft, he was unable to obtain employment. At first the little savings made by his frugal and excellent wife were encroached upon; these soon went, and then the superfluous raiment began to disappear. Next, the furniture was ren-

dered available to supply the means of sustaining life; and the little articles of comfort having been converted into bread, the necessaries followed. Day after day was the shop of the pawnbroker visited by either Melmoth or his wife; and on each occasion the barrier between their family and utter destitution grew less and less. In proportion as their worldly possessions disappeared, gaunt misery became more clearly developed in all its hideous outlines to their view. Every time a coat, or a gown, or a chair was removed from the decreasing stock, poverty grew more plainly visible. The spectral form of famine took larger proportions, in order to fill up each successive gap which the exigences of the day and the assistance of the pawnbroker made in the apparel and the furniture of this doomed family. And every mouthful of bread thus procured was eaten with a sharper pang and moistened with more plenteous tears.

At length the dreaded moment arrived, — that moment when the four bare walls had “ destitution ” written in unmistakable letters upon their otherwise blank surface, when the cupboard was empty, when the bedding had all disappeared, and the shivering children slept upon a sack filled with straw, and when only a broken chair, an old chest, and a few poor rags of clothing were left. Yes, this awful moment came, that crisis whose approach had been marked with shuddering looks and with eyes that could not be averted; it had come, this fatal phase in the history of poverty and suffering; and, terrible even in the distance as it had appeared, there was in its presence a reality so stern, so remorseless, so excruciating, and so thoroughly maddening, that God alone can tell what hope now sustained the wretched parents as they felt starvation themselves and beheld their children dying by inches before their eyes.

It was evening, nine o'clock in the evening, when we thus introduce the Melmoth family to our readers. The man and his wife had not tasted food for forty-eight hours; the boy of thirteen had fasted for twenty-four hours; and the last crust, stale and scanty, Heaven knows, had been divided in the morning between the younger lad and the girl. Rose Foster had passed as long a period as Melmoth and his wife without eating; and thus every soul in that garret was hungering unto death. The man and the woman, the young lady, the three children, and the infant, seven human beings

in all, were starving, perishing through famine, wasting away with want.

And yet these seven human beings were dwelling in a land teeming with wealth, in a city to whose bosom the commercial navies of the world wafted the produce of the fairest climes of the earth; yes, dwelling in this London where the luxuries of life abounded as amply as the necessities, and where the granaries, the provision-shops, and the markets were stored with a profusion which the promptitude of supply, produce, and import rendered inexhaustible.

These thoughts swept through the reeling, rocking, maddening brain of Melmoth, as he cast a rapid glance around and beheld the babe feebly pulling at its mother's withered breast, the mother herself appearing the very image of despair, the boy of eight beginning to whisper, in half-frightened tone and manner, an imploring prayer for food, the little girl crying bitterly, the elder boy ceasing his attempts to soothe her because he himself was now goaded by the poignancy of famine, and Rose Foster leaning in ineffable anguish against the naked wall of the wretched, cold, and cheerless garret.

It was nine o'clock, we said, and Melmoth had not been in above a quarter of an hour. During the entire day had he sought for work, and the invariable answer, when he told his name, was a stern negative. He would have given a false name, he would have done anything short of an actual crime, in order to have been enabled to carry home hope to his destitute family; but that deceit would not have availed him, for references would have been required. And now, beggared, starving, famishing, and with this appalling spectacle of misery before his eyes, he felt for the first time in his life as if he really could perpetrate a crime to obtain bread for those perishing little ones.

On returning home — great God! such a home as it was! — on the evening to which we are referring, the almost maddened man had flung down his battered hat upon the trunk which once was filled with good clothes, but which now was empty; and sinking exhausted on the broken chair, he threw one glance of hopeless misery around, and then fell into the reverie of dark despair. No word escaped his lips; he had not a syllable of hope to give, and the atmosphere of that garret was already too cheerless and too redolent of woe to need the breath of his intense affliction to enhance its bitter-

ness. The moment the door had opened, his wife threw one searching, inquiring look upon him; but she read the answer in his countenance, and, with a bursting heart, she bent down her eyes again upon the wan, thin face of the famished babe that lay so lightly on her arm.

Thus a quarter of an hour passed, and not a word was spoken in that habitation of misery.

At length Rose Foster appeared suddenly to receive the inspiration of some hope or to make up her mind to some particular course; and, advancing toward the unhappy man, she laid her hand upon his shoulder, saying, "Mr. Melmoth, this cannot continue. Happen what may, I am determined to go at once and appeal to the bounty of Mr. Meagles."

As these words, uttered in a tone combining firmness with deep pathos, fell upon the ears of the working man who had no work to do, he raised his eyes with an expression of thankfulness, as much as to say, "Yes, go, I implore you;" but when he beheld that countenance of soft and touching beauty, and marked the air of virgin innocence which characterized the maiden, he relented from his own selfishness, and, desperate as the emergency was, he said, "No, miss, I cannot consent to your adopting a course which may lead to your ruin."

"But perhaps you are deceived in Mr. Meagles," she urged, timidly.

"I know, as I have already told you, miss, that he is the boon companion of the prince, and panders to all his most detestable vices," responded Melmoth. "This is notorious, young lady, and I cannot be so thoroughly heartless and selfish as to let you run headlong into ruin and disgrace."

"No, we will perish sooner than be the means of having a hair of your head injured," observed Mrs. Melmoth, in a tone naturally soft and pleasing, but which want and misery had rendered weak, plaintive, and tremulous.

"Oh, it grieves me to the soul," exclaimed the young maiden, tears streaming down her cheeks, "to think that people possessed of hearts so excellent as yours should be plunged into such an abyss of misery. It is my duty, my bounden duty to do all I can, yes, and dare every peril that may spring up in my path, so long as there is the slightest chance of procuring bread for these poor children. Think you, my dear friends, that I am unmindful of all you have done for me? Oh, no, no," she cried, with the enthusiasm of

a fervent gratitude. "If years and years had passed since you, Mr. Melmoth, first brought me hither, yes, if many years instead of a few days had passed since then, my memory would remain equally vivid and my thankfulness equally sincere."

"Would to God I had the means of assisting you substantially, dear young lady," ejaculated Melmoth, clasping his hands in the bitterness of his mental anguish. "What I have done for you is nothing. I found you senseless upon the door-step of this house —"

"And while the landlady and the other lodgers reproached you for paying any attention to a mere stranger," interjected Rose, emphatically, "your excellent heart would not permit you to be deterred from performing an act of generosity, of charity, of benevolence."

"Do not speak of it, young lady," said Mrs. Melmoth. "My husband was incapable of deserting or neglecting a fellow creature whom he found in such a condition; and when you told us your artless tale, and it appeared by the description you gave of the Mr. Harley who persecuted you that he could be none other than the Prince of Wales —"

"Yes," ejaculated Melmoth, starting from his seat in an excited manner and gesticulating fiercely, "when we found that you were a good and innocent girl who had escaped from the snares of the prince only to fall into the hands of a gang of robbers who plundered you of all you possessed, and when we thus ascertained that you were the victim of those circumstances which resulted from the vile persecution that he had attempted against you, we were more than ever resolved to protect you to the last. For it is the countenance and support of bad kings and princes that enable the aristocracy to tyrannize over the people; and the middle classes especially, catching the terrible infection of despotism and selfishness from the grade above them, grind us poor working men down to the very dust. But what are you thinking of doing, miss?" demanded Melmoth, abruptly, as he saw that Rose was putting on her bonnet.

"Grant me your patience for one moment," said the gentle maiden. "Seven days ago you found me senseless in the street, upon the door-step of this house. You rendered me assistance; you left me not to perish unaided there, as the heartless landlady and the other lodgers would have done,

but, though crushed to the earth by the weight of your own afflictions, you nevertheless bestowed your sympathy upon me. Your excellent wife joined you in this benevolence, she shared in the generosity of the deed. I told you my tale without reserve, and you believed me at once. I might have been a designing, artful girl, and then how your confidence would have been misplaced! But your own good hearts prompted you both to put faith in the poor friendless stranger and you bade me remain with you. Nay, more, you even persuaded the landlady of the house to grant me a lodging, until I could obtain needlework and pay her."

"And that work, my dear young lady, you have been, alas! unable to procure," said Mrs. Melmoth, in a voice that was broken by deep sobs. "Would to God that you had succeeded, for your own sake! But Heaven alone knows what is to become of us all," she added, as she threw a glance of despair upon the babe that was now moaning with a low and subdued plaintiveness in her arms.

"I was about to tell you what is to become of us," exclaimed Rose, emphatically. "We must obtain bread, — bread, at any risk, at any sacrifice, bread for those dear children, at least, if not for ourselves. And if I recapitulated all that you have done for me, my good friends, it is merely to convince you that I am mindful of your generosity."

"Generosity!" repeated Melmoth, bitterly but not sarcastically; "we had nothing to give."

"Yes, I have eaten at your expense, I have obtained a lodging on your credit. I should have been a houseless, starving, unfriended wanderer without you," said Rose, with a voice and manner of fervid gratefulness; "and I cannot see your children perish before your eyes without making an effort to save them. Despite, therefore, of all you have told me concerning this Mr. Meagles, I will hasten to him, I will throw myself at his feet, I will implore him to succour you."

"God bless you, Miss Foster!" cried Melmoth, grasping both her hands and pressing them forcibly in his own. "God bless you, dear young lady, but this must not be. You will only run into the snares of your enemies, you will be delivered over to the prince —"

"I cannot think that Mr. Meagles is capable of such treachery," said Rose, interrupting the journeyman hatter. "I have already explained to you the circumstances under

which I formed his acquaintance, the kindness which he then manifested toward me, the assistance he rendered, the delicate attentions he paid me — ”

“ Be assured, Miss Foster, that the blackest treachery lurked at the bottom of all that seeming friendship,” interrupted Melmoth. “ He saw that you were beautiful, innocent, and artless — ”

At this moment the door was flung violently open, and a short, thin, hatchet-faced woman, with a very vixenish look, made her appearance upon the threshold. The young maiden shrank back in alarm, for she was instantly seized with a presentiment of the coming storm; and the children, terrified by the abrupt and uncereemonious manner of the woman’s entrance, huddled together and began to cry in mournful concert.

“ Mrs. Thomas,” said Melmoth, adopting as conciliatory a tone as possible, “ I am well aware for what purpose you have come — ”

“ Then pay me, if you please,” interrupted the landlady, for such the woman was. “ Pay me, if you please,” she repeated, in that sharp, shrill, penetrating voice which usually belongs to the character of a vixen.

“ I must request your patience a little longer, Mrs. Thomas,” returned the unhappy man, in an imploring tone. “ You see that I have been unable to obtain work for the present — ”

“ And never will!” cried the landlady, her voice swelling into a screech. “ They say you’ve ruined yourself by spouting at public meetings and so on, and the hat manufacturers looks on you with suspicion. They think you’ll raise a mob and burn their houses down, and so they won’t have nothink to do with you.”

“ Let us hope, Mrs. Thomas, that things will not continue quite so bad as all this,” said Melmoth. “ It is perfectly true that I have experienced a great deal of cruel persecution on account of my political opinions; but surely, surely,” he added, in a tone of deep feeling, “ this unjust prejudice must wear away sooner or later.”

“ Sooner or later, indeed!” shrieked forth the landlady, now worked or rather having worked herself, up to a high pitch of irritability. “ And am I to wait till doomsday for my rent, I should like to know. Here’s twenty-six shillings

due from you, and half a crown the week's rent for this young woman here, and not a sixpence forthcoming, as far as I can see."

"God knows it is true!" murmured the unhappy man, turning aside and covering his face with his hands.

At the sight of their father's grief, the wailing of the children became piteous in the extreme. Mrs. Melmoth, rising up with her babe in her arms, endeavoured to say something to pacify the landlady; but anguish choked her utterance, for when she was about to implore the woman's forbearance until the morrow, the sickening conviction rushed to her mind that there was not a single hope left.

"Mrs. Thomas," said Rose Foster, accosting the landlady, whom her sweet tone and manner somewhat mollified for a moment, "I beseech you to grant an hour's delay before you adopt any harsh measure toward this worthy but most unhappy family. Late though it now is, I am going to see a friend —"

"Ah! a friend, indeed — I've no doubt of it," observed the landlady, throwing a sudden glance of cruel suspicion upon Miss Foster. "But howsomever, it doesn't matter to me where the money comes from, so long as it does come —"

"Do not insult this young lady," exclaimed Melmoth, turning abruptly and sternly around upon the unfeeling vixen; "her conduct is above suspicion."

"Oh, well, I dare say you will answer for her good behaviour and become bail for her character, as you have for her rent," cried the landlady. "But them as bails ought to be substaunshal —"

"One hour, only one hour, and everything shall be paid," exclaimed Rose, writhing under the insult which the woman had so heartlessly levelled at her; and, having thus spoken, she hurried from the room.

There was a pause of nearly a minute, during which Melmoth remained uncertain whether to hasten after her and fetch her back, or whether he should allow her to run the risk which he feared she would encounter in paying a visit to Tim Meagles. But while he was wavering between two opposite impulses, the echoes of her light feet descending the stairs rapidly grew fainter and fainter until they ceased altogether. And still he remained motionless in the room, his desperate condition prompting him to suffer the young

maiden to put to the test the only alternative to which hope could possibly point.

"Well, I tell you what it is, Mr. Melmoth," said the landlady; breaking silence at the expiration of a minute: "that Miss Foster has gone away to raise money somehow or another and of course I'm not obleeged to know or care by what means. It's just half-past nine o'clock, and I don't mind waiting till eleven. My 'usband won't be home till then, and so I've got to set up for him. But if so be the cash isn't forthcoming by that hour, you and your family must all tramp off this very night; and if you won't go by fair means, I shall make free to send for the constable and turn you out by foul. So the matter stands in that there way betwixt us."

Having thus spoken, and without waiting for a reply, Mrs. Thomas hurried down-stairs.

Melmoth closed the door behind her, and, turning toward his wife, he read despair in the countenance of the unhappy woman as she sank back on the low seat whence she had risen a few minutes previously.

"Holy God! what is to become of us?" exclaimed the wretched man, dashing his clenched fists with terrible violence against his forehead, so that the blows sounded as plainly as if they had been dealt upon the table.

"James, my dearest James, tranquillize yourself!" almost screamed forth his heart-broken wife, now cruelly alarmed by the dreadful excitement to which misery had goaded her husband.

And the children, gathering around their father, clung to his clothes, weeping bitterly, and gazing up in mingled piteousness and alarm toward the countenance which wore an expression alike strange and menacing, and such as had never been observed upon those features until then.

CHAPTER XLVI

DESPERATION

FOR some minutes the persecuted working man remained standing, drawn up to his full height, in the midst of his children. His left hand was thrust into his breast, his right was clenched, and his whole frame shook with nervous tremblings. Terrible thoughts appeared to sweep across his countenance, and his wife, who was a shrewd and intelligent woman, was seized with the sudden fear that some desperate project was springing up in her husband's imagination or that his mind was undergoing a fearful change, the transition convulsing his whole being.

The little boy of eight clung to him on one side, the little girl on the other, and the elder lad stood before him, beseeching that he would be comforted.

But the man stared wildly upon them; and the more sinister grew the workings of his features, the deeper became the impression in the bosom of his unhappy wife that he was revolving some plan the nature of which she shuddered to conjecture.

"James," she said at length, once more rising from her seat, and approaching him with the babe in her arms, — that babe which was giving forth a weak, plaintive cry, as if the hand of death were already weighing heavily upon its frail and emaciated form, — "James, my dear husband, in the name of God, look not thus upon your children! See, they are terrified, your manner alarms them. What ails you? What are you thinking of? Speak, I implore you to speak!"

"Father, dear father, speak!" murmured the elder boy, joining his thin and wasted hands in earnest appeal.

"What am I thinking of?" he exclaimed, with the wildness and the bitterness of a maniac, his eyes glaring almost

savagely as he spoke; and so terribly threatening did his voice sound that the cries of the children, all save the infant, were immediately hushed, and they gazed with mingled awe and apprehension upon the parent who had never seemed harsh nor unkind to them before. "What am I thinking of?" he repeated, and again the unnatural laughter sounded dread and ominous within the four bare walls of the dismantled, denuded garret. "I am thinking," he proceeded, in a tone of concentrated bitterness, "that it is useless to let society make war upon us any longer without the slightest attempt at retaliation. I am thinking that I am a coward, a sneaking, paltry, mean, despicable coward, to submit to a diabolical persecution and offer no enmity in return. I am thinking that a civilized society has no right to hunt any of its members to death, nor to goad them to desperation: if it do, it must take the consequences. I am thinking that honesty amounts to a crime when my wife and children are starving around me and an unfeeling landlady threatens to have us turned forth into the streets; and I begin to look upon myself as a craven-spirited, pusillanimous, degraded wretch who wants the courage to seize upon those rights which a vitiated system denies him. God never placed us in this world to starve. He could not have sent these innocent children upon earth to endure all the agonies of that lingering death which famine is inflicting. No, no; it is impossible. We have a right to live, and it was intended that we should live, because we were not put upon the earth by our own wish. We did not ask to be born. If we did, then might we be punished for our presumption; but it is not our own fault that we are here, and, since God is good and wise, He would not have called us into being merely to leave us in the position of intruders upon the rest of the world. No, I begin to understand things in a new light. We have a right to receive a subsistence from the earth, inasmuch as we have been placed upon it by God Himself; and if this subsistence be denied to us, if work be refused when we ask for work, if the bread of industry be withholden, then must we take what is not granted."

"In the name of Heaven, James, cease this dreadful language!" cried the wretched woman, whose powers of utterance had been totally suspended for a few minutes while her husband was thus giving vent to the doctrines which,

like new intuitions, had sprung up in his mind as suddenly and with all the vividness of the lightning that awes while it dazzles and is terrible in its grandeur.

“Dreadful language!” repeated Melmoth, bending upon his quailing, shrinking wife a look that was even ferocious. “By the living God,” he exclaimed, in a tone of wild exultation, his eyes flashing fire, his nostrils dilating, and his whole form appearing to expand into the dignity of godlike proportions, so that this son of toil, this man of the people, this obscure and starving mechanic became an object terrible to gaze upon in the glory of his wrath and the sublimity of his indignation, — “by the living God,” he cried, “I will submit to all these wrongs no more. Patience is exhausted, and endurance has reached that point when it becomes a crime. Whence are we to obtain food save from those who have self-appropriated the fruits of the earth? Who shall dare tell me that starvation is a doom for which we have no right to reproach our fellow creatures? Against whom, then, must our reproaches be levelled? Not against the Almighty — oh, no, we cannot perpetrate such a tremendous impiety nor give utterance to such an appalling blasphemy. And yet, since the earth yields enough to maintain all who are upon it, there is a diabolical injustice somewhere when a whole family is perishing through want. Tell me, then, wife, you who say that my language is dreadful, tell me in which direction we are to look for the fountain of that injustice. I have already said that we dare not complain against God: and therefore we must accuse man. Yes, the favoured few are our enemies, the oligarchy are our foes. The bread which by right belongs to my children is now in the mansions of the rich: they have stolen it from me. Oh, my beloved babes,” exclaimed the man, in a voice of rending agony mingled with savage vindictiveness, “the food to which ye are justly entitled has been snatched away from you by the usurpers and the tyrants who have monopolized all the elegances of life and refuse us even the necessities. But this shall endure no longer; I will not kiss the hand that strikes me. Forbearance becomes a flagrant cowardice, and I am resolved how to act. Hear me, therefore, my dear wife, thou partner of my woes and sufferings; hear me also, ye well-beloved children, victims of an accursed condition of society which blesses the few at the expense of the many; hear me, I say,” continued Mel-

moth, raising his voice until it filled that dismantled garret like the rage of the whirlwind and the fury of the storm, "hear me while I proclaim a war to the knife against those whom I regard as my enemies, a crusade without quarter against the oppressors of the millions and the usurpers of their rights, a combat to the death against the miscreants who have made God's earth a paradise for themselves and a hell for all the rest."

"James — my God! he is raving!" cried the wretched Mrs. Melmoth, now falling upon her knees before her husband, an example which was instantaneously followed by the two boys and the young girl; and, sobbing bitterly, they all clung around the half-maddened man, who still remained standing in the midst of that starving woebegone, perishing family.

"No, wife, I am not raving," he exclaimed, his countenance suddenly softening into an expression of boundless compassion and love, as he bent his looks upon those who thus knelt around him. "But I have awoke from a dream, an idle dream, the dream that what the world calls honesty was indeed something to be admired, practised, and persevered in. Oh, it was a grand stroke of policy for the spoliators and plunderers of the millions to invent that word honesty, to proclaim it as a cardinal virtue, to invest it with even a halo of divine sanctity, to have it preached from the pulpit, written in the laws, and advocated by the press! Oh, it was a masterpiece of ingenuity for ensuring to the few the safe possession and the secure enjoyment of all that they have plundered from the many! But henceforth I discard the doctrine, I scatter to the winds the morality which it inculcates, and I will become what the world denominates a robber and a thief."

"Oh, no, recall that dreadful menace, recall it, I implore you!" shrieked forth the almost heartbroken wife. "Add not to the misery of our present condition."

"Father, dear father, do what mother asks you," exclaimed the children, in united entreaties of anguished fervour. "Pray do not tell us that you will become a robber. It is wicked to be a thief, and you yourself have often told us so, dear father."

"Yes, but I was a fool, an insensate fool," cried Melmoth, driven to desperation and pursuing the terrible current of thoughts which had sprung up in his fevered brain and had

acquired a complete mastery over his imagination. "Do not fancy, my beloved wife, do not suppose, my dear children, that I will any longer suffer myself to be the victim of those theories which the rich have invented as a protection for their ill-got gains. They have plundered us, and yet they dare to maintain that it would be dishonest were we to take back from them the fruit of their own rascality; they have practised a tremendous system of spoliation against ourselves, and yet we are told that it would be wrong to assume the aggressive in return. The word honesty constitutes the barrier with which they have surrounded the accumulated produce of their own misdeeds; and the word dishonesty is the bugbear with which they seek to frighten away all those who might endeavour to molest them in the enjoyment of their usurped possessions. They have taken away the bread from me, from you, from all of us; and I will recover back a portion of what is our due. They have made laws to justify their spoliation and their wrong; and I should be a coward were I not to set those laws at defiance. From this moment, then, do I proclaim war against our oppressors, ravage against the ravagers, invasion against the invaders, desolation against the desolators. Yes, by the living God," thundered Melmoth, now worked up to an appalling state of excitement, and gesticulating ferociously, "I will plunder the plunderers, I will despoil the spoliators, I will play the brigand against the titled and proudly born banditti of this realm."

And exhausted with the violence of tone and gesticulation which had accompanied this dreadful harangue, Melmoth sank upon the empty chest, gasping for breath, and every vein in his forehead swollen almost to bursting.

Then piteous and heartrending indeed was it to behold the anguished wife and weeping children gathering around that man on whose head lay the heavy responsibilities of a husband and a father, — yes, gathering around him with despair depicted upon their wan and emaciated countenances, extending toward him their thin and fleshless hands, and addressing him in prayers of the most passionate entreaty. The woman held up toward him the poor, frail, half-famished babe, as she adjured him to discard the terrible thoughts to which he had just given such startling and horrifying expression; but the low, weak, feeble cry which the infant's

lips sent forth struck upon the father's ears and touched a cord that vibrated with maddening effect to his very heart's core.

"Rise, my dear wife, rise, my beloved children," he exclaimed, springing from his seat on the chest, and waving his arms over their heads with the mingled wildness and sublimity of a prophet who foretells grand but dreadful things; "you know not what you say when you ask me to become tranquil. Are ye not perishing before my eyes? Is not the iron of starvation entering in unto our very souls, and can I, as a husband and a father, remain quiet and behold unmoved the progress of this work of death? No, no, ten thousand times no!" he shouted, frantically. "I should be the vilest of cowards were I to see you die thus; without making an effort to save you. To hell with honesty, when wife and children are perishing with want! To hell with all maudlin morality and sickly sentimentalism, when those whom one loves are going down to the tomb through famine and misery! Look at that innocent babe: in a few hours it will be no more, for your bosom is dry, wife; starvation has withered up your breast. May God's vengeance fall upon me if I endure this spectacle tamely! No, by the eternal justice, ye shall have bread, ye shall eat, ye shall not die of want in the heart of a city teeming with abundance. Again I declare that I should be a pitiful coward, a mean-spirited dog, the veriest poltroon that ever disgraced the noble dignity of man, were I to let you perish thus without making an effort to save you."

And, breaking away from his wife and children, the unhappy man, maddened to desperation, sprang to the door. But he had not time to open it ere they arrested his progress, surrounded him again, clung to him, implored him not to leave them, and mingled the most passionate entreaties with the bitterest weeping.

"Hark!" he exclaimed, abruptly, waving his hand so imperiously that they fell back as if by a simultaneous impulse, and a dead silence suddenly reigned in the room, broken only by the low, plaintive cry of the infant. "One — two — three —"

And he counted on until he had numbered eleven; for the church clock was proclaiming that hour at which the landlady was to be paid or the family was to be thrust forth into the street.

"I will go and speak to Mrs. Thomas," said Melmoth's wife. "I will even fall upon my knees at her feet; I will show her this dying child — O God! would that we were all dead, or that we had never been born!"

And the wretched woman sank upon the broken chair, her whole frame convulsed with the agonizing sobs that tore her bosom.

"Wife, listen to me one moment," exclaimed Melmoth, in a tone which though soothing and kind toward her was nevertheless characterized by a firmness that seemed ominous and even terrible after all the previous outpourings of his fevered spirit: "the hour of our doom has struck. It was the knell of fate which rang in our ears. Our only hope is gone, for you see that Miss Foster has not returned. This was what I expected, what I feared. She has fallen into the hands of her enemies. Alas! poor girl, she has encountered dishonour in her generous resolve to seek bread for us. Now, my dear wife, I beseech you to tranquillize yourself, for my sake, for your children's sake. You perceive that I am calm, very calm —"

"O God! 'tis a calmness which does me more harm to observe than even the excitement which ruled you just now," said the miserable woman, fixing a look full of terror upon the rigid and implacable features of her husband; for his countenance wore the stamp and impress of an iron determination.

"My resolve is taken," he answered, in a cold voice that trembled not; "and no human tongue can dissuade me from adopting it. The war that I have proclaimed against the few who have usurped the rights and self-appropriated the food of the many, that war commences this night. Within an hour the first campaign will have taken place. Ere the clock strikes twelve, I swear to you that I shall return, and then, my beloved wife, then, my dearest children, you shall have bread to eat and money to pay the rent. Yes, by the eternal God," he exclaimed, in a sudden paroxysm of returning excitement, "ye shall neither starve nor become houseless wanderers so long as the wives and children of the accursed brood of hereditary usurpers revel in luxury and abundance."

Having thus spoken, James Melmoth tore open the door, rushed from the room, and was already half-way down the

stairs before his wife and children could even recover from the consternation into which this sudden movement had plunged them. But, in a few moments, a rending cry proclaimed all the anguish which smote the heart of the wretched woman, and then the grief, the tears, and the sobs of the children burst forth anew.

Mrs. Melmoth hastened down-stairs in pursuit of her husband; but at the very instant that she reached the bottom of the lowest flight the front door was banged violently behind him.

"Holy God! he is gone," exclaimed the miserable creature, pressing her babe despairingly to her bosom, as she leaned against the wall for support.

"But he says that he shall be back in an hour," observed the vixenish landlady, stepping forward from the farther end of the passage; "and then he has promised to pay me. Howsomever, as I don't mean to sit up on purpose for that, it will do the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Heaven have mercy upon me and my innocent children!" murmured Mrs. Melmoth, in a tone of concentrated anguish; and, without making any reply to the landlady, she slowly dragged her failing limbs up the stairs, back to the garret where the other boy was vainly endeavouring to console his little brother and sister.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE YOUNG MAIDEN'S ADVENTURES

LET us now return to Rose Foster, who, upon sallying forth from the house in which the Melmoths lived, repaired straight to Jermyn Street. The distance between the neighbourhood of Westminster Abbey and the latter place was accomplished in about a quarter of an hour, for the young lady sped rapidly along. It was not, however, without a feeling of apprehension that she found herself in the close vicinage of St. James's Square, upon which, be it remembered, a portion of Mrs. Brace's establishment looked, and into which Rose had descended on the night of her escape from the Prince of Wales.

Upon reaching Mrs. Pigglesberry's house in Jermyn Street, the trembling girl learned with a profound satisfaction that Mr. Meagles was at home and also disengaged. But even while she was ascending the stairs to his apartment, a mis-giving sprang up in her mind, for she thought that if Melmoth's suspicions, or rather, representations concerning him, were indeed accurate to the letter, she was encountering a peril that might prove fatal to her honour and her happiness in this world. She stopped short for a moment; she was even inclined to turn back suddenly and beat a precipitate retreat from the house, but the countenances of Melmoth's famished wife and children presented themselves to her imagination, and she continued her way up the stairs, Mrs. Pigglesberry guiding her.

A door was thrown open, and in another moment the young maiden found herself in the presence of Tim Meagles.

Starting from the chair in which he was lounging, tossing into the fire the cigar which he was smoking, and almost upsetting the bottle of claret which he had commenced,

Meagles bounded toward her, exclaiming, "Miss Foster! is it indeed you? Thank God that we have met again!"

The pressure which he gave her hand in both his own was as warm and cordial as his words were fervent and welcome; and as he led the maiden to a seat, she felt convinced in her own mind that Meagles must have been calumniated to Melmoth, who had misjudged his character accordingly.

"Sit down, Miss Foster, compose yourself; you are agitated, you are pale, but you have nothing to fear in this house," exclaimed Meagles, giving rapid utterance to these assurances. "I know that you have been persecuted, but I thank God that I see you safe again, and I implore you to look upon me as a friend."

"Oh, Mr. Meagles," cried the orphan girl, bursting into tears, "if I had not already considered you in that light, I should not have ventured into your presence now. Pardon this intrusion, forgive this boldness, but —"

She stopped short, a faintness came over her, and, pale though she was at first, yet her countenance now grew so suddenly ashy that Meagles feared she was about to faint. Pouring out a glass of water, he held it to her lips. She had just strength sufficient to imbibe a few drops, and the cold beverage revived her.

"Will you not lay aside your bonnet, Miss Foster?" said Meagles, throwing into his tone and manner as much respectful attention and delicate courtesy as it was possible to convey or imply by those means. "You are aware that I have no wife, nor sister, nor indeed any female relative to whom I can introduce you; but my landlady will pay you all due regard —"

"Mr. Meagles," interrupted Rose, now thoroughly reassured with respect to his character, and angry with herself that she had ever suspected its integrity, "I understand and appreciate all the generosity and delicacy of your conduct toward me; but inasmuch as I come to you as a friend, nay, more, as a sister would fly for succour and advice to a brother, it is unnecessary that there should be any third person present while I converse with you. But you said that you knew I had been persecuted —"

"Alas! poor orphan girl," said Meagles, in a tone of deep feeling, while tears started forth from his eyes, "I have indeed heard of the terrible adventure which you experienced

a week ago, and I have been making unceasing inquiries concerning you."

"You, Mr. Meagles!" ejaculated Rose, in amazement.

"Yes, certainly," responded Tim, in a tone of unquestionable candour. "From the first moment that I saw you I felt interested in you, as, my God! who would not be considering the cruel misfortunes which have overtaken you at so early a period of your life? The note which you sent me some weeks ago gave me pain, because I had hoped and flattered myself that you would condescend to look upon me as a friend. But at the same time I admired your prudence, Miss Foster, and, while I deplored the step which you had taken, inasmuch as it left me ignorant of your place of abode, the good opinion I had already formed of you was enhanced to the highest degree. You now understand, therefore, that I have thought of you often, and very frequently have I wished to know where you were, that I might ascertain if you were contented with the new career you had traced out for yourself. Conceive, then, my dismay, my grief, my indignation, when I learned, a week ago, that you had been made the object of a cruel persecution."

"Ah! Mr. Meagles," exclaimed Rose, the tears chasing each other down her cheeks, "had I treated you with less reserve, had I consulted you frankly and ingenuously ere I resolved upon any particular proceeding, all that I have endured and encountered would have been avoided. Believing the establishment which I entered to be one of the highest respectability —"

"Oh, what perils have you encountered, Miss Foster!" exclaimed Meagles, abruptly; "for your eyes are doubtless now open to the true character of Mrs. Brace's house."

"But how did you learn all that has happened to me?" she demanded. "Report says that you are intimate with the Prince of Wales, and it was as an emissary from his Royal Highness to my poor father that you first became acquainted with me. I must conclude, then, that the prince himself made known to you his unworthy conduct and the manner in which I escaped from him, by adopting a course which makes me shudder even now when I think of it."

"Heroic girl!" ejaculated Meagles, "I also have shuddered a thousand times on your account ever since the daring exploit was made known to me. Yes, from the lips of the

prince himself did I hear the tale which excited within me a sentiment of abhorrence toward him equalled only by that of admiration in regard to yourself."

"Was it possible that his Royal Highness knew all along that Camilla Morton was none other than the Rose Foster whom his own wickedness had made an orphan?" inquired the young maiden.

"No, he only ascertained that fact at the last moment — indeed, at the same time that he discovered your flight," answered Meagles. "A letter which you had dropped in the hurry and confusion of that memorable night, and which his Royal Highness picked up, informed him who you were. But think not, Miss Foster, that he was stricken with remorse, or that if he were, the feeling lasted more than a moment. No," cried Meagles, emphatically, "that man is incapable of sentiments permanently generous or noble; and beware, Miss Foster, how you fall in his way. Let us not, however, dwell upon topics so unpleasant. I was ere now telling you that during the last week I have been making unceasing inquiries concerning you, and this is so true that I have neglected many important matters which demanded my attention. But I knew enough of you to be aware that you are inexperienced and confiding. Virtuous and well-intentioned yourself, you are naturally prone to place reliance upon others; and I trembled, Miss Foster, oh, I trembled lest you should fall into the snares of the artful, the designing, and the unprincipled."

"Oh, how can I ever sufficiently express my gratitude for all this generous sympathy and friendship on your part?" exclaimed Rose, her voice almost suffocated with sobs. "Alas! alas! I have indeed become the victim of my inexperience, at least so far as my pecuniary affairs are concerned."

"Tell me all that has occurred to you, Miss Foster," cried Meagles, "since the night on which you escaped from Mrs. Brace's house. I am certain you have endured much; your adventures have been of no ordinary description, for you are pale, care-worn, altered —"

"Heavens! how can it be otherwise?" exclaimed Rose, suddenly becoming painfully excited as the thought of all she had passed through was recalled with terrible vividness to her mind. "Yes, I did indeed trust to people whom I be-

lieved honest, and they plundered me, robbed me, Mr. Meagles, of every guinea of that sum which you yourself had invested in my name at the Bank of England. Oh, why did I not come to you? But I sent, or rather, some one pretended to call upon you, and I was assured that you had gone to Scotland."

"Poor girl! you have been terribly deceived indeed," said Meagles. "How cruelly has fortune persecuted you!"

"But I have deserved it all for not having relied on your friendship," exclaimed Rose, with passionate vehemence. "Yes, I have deserved it all, even to the starvation, the famine which I have experienced —"

"Holy God! is this possible?" ejaculated Meagles, starting from his chair and fixing his eyes on the orphan girl in dismay. "Starvation, famine — No, no, it cannot be! And I have been eating and drinking of the best. Just Heaven! starvation, famine!" he repeated, now becoming terribly excited in his turn. "Alas! alas! those pale cheeks, that altered mien — Oh, Miss Foster, Miss Foster, how is it possible that you could have endured all this without deigning to recollect that I was your friend? But, my God! while I am thus giving way to my feelings, you are suffering with hunger —"

And he sprang toward the bell to summon his valet to spread food upon the table. But Rose, divining his intention, caught hold of his arm, exclaiming, "I require nothing now, my heart is too full, and, moreover, I have left kind and generous friends perishing with want."

"Command me in every way, Miss Foster," interrupted Meagles. "Tell me how I can serve you or those in whom you are interested. Thank God, my purse is well filled at this moment, and if it were not, I would sell everything to obtain the means of fulfilling your wishes."

"Generous friend, how deep is the debt of gratitude which I owe you!" exclaimed Rose, the tears again streaming down her cheeks. "But grant me your patience a few minutes, and I will tell you all that has occurred to me since the night on which I escaped from the dwelling of Mrs. Brace."

Meagles reseated himself, and Rose proceeded to recount the various adventures with which the reader is already acquainted, — how she fell in with a man and woman who

demonstrated the utmost sympathy toward her, how they plundered her of all she possessed in the world, how she experienced a real compassion and kindness at the hands of the Melmoths, and how she had just left that family not only perishing through destitution, but likewise menaced with ejection from the miserable garret that constituted their home.

"Where do these good people live?" inquired Meagles, again springing from his seat. "I will lose not a moment in repairing to their aid."

Miss Foster mentioned the address, and Meagles put on his hat.

"But I will go with you," she said. "Indeed I am glad to avail myself of your escort, at this late hour, to the place which is likewise my home now," she added, with a mournful tremulousness of the voice, for the recent incidents of her life were constantly reminding her of the happy days when she dwelt beneath the same roof with those fond parents who were now no more.

"Miss Foster," said Meagles, "if you wish to return to the lodging which, from all the circumstances you have just revealed to me, I must presume to be a very humble one, I shall conduct you thither, as a matter of course. But if you will place yourself in the care of my landlady until to-morrow, when we shall be enabled to consult together upon future arrangements for your welfare and happiness —"

"Mr. Meagles," interrupted Rose, "I have witnessed and shared the misery of the poor family to whom I owe so many obligations, and, as your generosity is about to prove the means of their salvation, I could wish to behold and join in the happiness that you are this night destined to raise up in their abode. Permit me, then, to accompany you," she added, in a tone of earnest entreaty; "and to-morrow I shall venture to intrude myself upon your presence again, for, alas! the poor orphan, Mr. Meagles, has no other friend on earth save you."

"And the sincerity of my friendship, Miss Foster, shall be proved by the alacrity and cheerfulness with which I am prepared to fulfil all your wishes. Come, then, and we will hasten together to the abode of these worthy but unhappy people whose hearts were not hardened by poverty nor rendered selfish by misery against the sufferings of a fellow creature."

Rose darted a look of fervent gratitude upon Meagles, whose honourable intentions with regard to herself now seemed beyond all question; and they sallied forth together, just as the bells of St. James's Church were chiming a quarter past eleven.

CHAPTER XLVIII

STARTLING INCIDENTS

ALTHOUGH she had fasted for so many long hours, yet Rose Foster felt not hungry now. Hope had risen up in her bosom, — that hope which was meat and drink to her physical being, and animation and excitement to her spirits. Meagles was proving himself a friend, and they were on their way together to carry succour and solace to the starving family of the working man who was able and willing to work, but could obtain no work to do.

A quarter past eleven! The hour had gone by at which the rent was to be paid, but by half-past eleven they could reach the Melmoths' lodging in Westminster, and doubtless it would not be too late.

These thoughts swept rapidly through the brain of the young maiden, as, leaning upon the arm of Tim Meagles, she hurried along Jermyn Street; and as it was shorter to cross St. James's Square than to go around by Lower Regent Street, she gently drew him in that direction, for the fear of reviving unpleasant reminiscences in her mind was prompting him to take the more circuitous route. But with Meagles as a protector, she dreaded nothing; moreover, her spirits were too elate with enthusiastic hope to allow room for any misgivings or apprehensions.

Firmly and lightly, therefore, tripped the feet of the pale but lovely girl on the pavement of that aristocratic square; and the moon, breaking from behind a cloud, brought into relief the fronts of the houses on the southern side and showed her the very window whence she had achieved her perilous descent a week back.

The night was cold and partially tempestuous; and scarcely had the silver planet peeped forth from the dark

curtains above, when it was obscured again by the dense and ominous masses of clouds, like a beauty coquetting from behind a black veil. Thus, having allowed Rose Foster a transient glimpse of the casement from which her flight had been accomplished, the fickle goddess of night disappeared suddenly, and it seemed as if some giant hand had piled the dark storm-clouds all in a moment before her alabaster throne.

The obscurity in St. James's Square was now relieved only by the feeble glimmering of the oil lamps stationed at wide intervals along the pavement skirting the houses; but the walk bordering the iron railings of the enclosure was involved in a far deeper darkness. The evergreens within the iron fence, a portion of which their branches overhung, formed a black shade in one particular spot; and it was while Meagles and Rose Foster were passing through this gloom, in order to make as short a cut as possible across the square, that a man suddenly sprang upon them, as it were, from out of the darkness.

So abrupt and violent was this attack that Meagles, against whom the ruffian had directed his assault, was levelled with the ground, where he lay either dead or senseless; and Rose, losing all her presence of mind in an instant, darted away, screaming for help and raising the cry of "Murder."

The man lost not a moment in profiting by the deed which he had committed. Rifling the pockets of Meagles, he possessed himself of that individual's purse and watch, which he hastily secured about his own person; but before he turned to fly, and although the rending screams of Rose were echoing thrillingly through the square, he bent for a few instants over the form of Meagles to ascertain whether life had departed. At that moment the moon shone forth again, and its beams falling upon the countenance of Meagles revealed its lineaments to the robber, so that, although he knew not who his victim was, yet he saw enough of his features to have them immediately impressed upon his memory. At the same time he thrust his hand into the breast of the unconscious man and felt that his heart was beating, though with feeble pulsations. Then, giving vent to the ejaculation of "Thank God! I am not a murderer yet," he darted precipitately away from the scene of his crime.

Meanwhile Rose Foster had fled madly and frantically,

without heeding the direction which she was taking, piercing screams still proclaiming her terror; when, all on a sudden, she came in violent contact with a lady who, attended by a tall livery servant, had stopped short in alarm at the rending voice of female anguish which thus broke frightfully upon the stillness of the place and hour.

“Good Heaven! what ails her?” exclaimed the lady, as Rose, utterly exhausted, sank fainting into her arms.

At that moment the moon revealed to her eyes the countenance — the well-known countenance — of Rose Foster; and an ejaculation of mingled joy and surprise followed that of alarm which had already burst from her lips. A word summoned the domestic to her side; and the powerful liveried lackey, raising the insensible girl in his arms, bore her hastily along to a house close by.

A few minutes afterward Rose began slowly to awake to consciousness; and her eyes, as they opened heavily, encountered the light of candles. Casting a gaze around, she perceived that she was lying upon the bed in a well-furnished chamber, the appearance of which instantaneously struck her as being not altogether unfamiliar. Pressing her hand to her brow in order to steady her thoughts, she speedily recollected the incidents of the night; and, startled by the remembrance that the last event had occurred in St. James’s Square, she flung a wild and shuddering look around. A terrible suspicion had suddenly sprung up in her mind, and it was now confirmed most fatally, for the chamber was indeed well known to the unhappy girl, and the never-to-be-forgotten countenance of Mrs. Brace was bending over her!

A moan of ineffable anguish burst from the laden bosom of the persecuted orphan, and her senses once more abandoned her.

In the meantime Meagles had recovered from the stunning effect of the violent blow which the robber had dealt him; and, rising from the ground, he leaned against the iron railings while he recalled to mind everything that had happened. Memory performed her part actively; and he found that Rose had disappeared, that he himself had been robbed of his purse and watch, and that his hat had alone saved his skull from being fractured by the desperate assault which had been made upon him with a bludgeon or some similarly heavy

weapon, the effects of which were still experienced most painfully.

But what had become of Rose? This was his principal consideration; and, caring comparatively nothing for the loss of his purse and watch and the contusion which he had received, he looked anxiously all around in search of the young orphan-maiden. Vainly did he thus plunge his eyes into the obscurity of the night: her form met not his view. In a hurried manner he made the circuit of the square; still she appeared not. What could have become of her? Perhaps she had returned to his lodgings to procure assistance. Thither he repaired; but Mrs. Piggleberry assured him that the young lady had not come back. Suddenly it struck him that she might have fled to her own humble abode; and as she had mentioned to him the address of the house where herself and the Melmoths lodged, he decided upon hastening thither without delay.

Toward Westminster Abbey did Tim Meagles accordingly proceed. Although he could not possibly account for Rose Foster's disappearance, and although he felt confident that she had not been murdered nor ill-treated by the same ruffian who had plundered him, it nevertheless did not strike him for an instant that she could have fallen once more into the hands of Mrs. Brace. Hoping, therefore, to find her at the house in which the Melmoths resided, he hastened thither with all speed; but even when he had plunged into the maze of pestilential streets where crime and poverty herded together almost beneath the very shade of the sacred abbey's towers, he experienced some degree of trouble in finding the dwelling which he sought.

But at last he succeeded; and ere he knocked at the door he looked up at the house. Every window was dark save one on the uppermost story; and thence a few feeble rays came forth, poverty's unmistakable rushlight glimmering.

Without further hesitation, Meagles knocked, not in a commanding manner, but quietly; for he was afraid of compromising the reputation of the young lady by announcing his visit at that late hour in a way calculated to attract attention on the part of the inmates of the dwelling or of the neighbours.

Several minutes elapsed, and he knocked again. At the expiration of a considerable interval, the door was opened,

and, by the dim and uncertain light of the moon, Meagles beheld the wasted and emaciated countenance of a lad of about thirteen.

"Does a working man of the name of Melmoth reside here?" asked Meagles; and, without waiting for the response, he added, "because I am come to relieve him."

"Yes, sir, he does; he is my father," said the lad.

"And Miss Foster —"

"Also lives in this house, sir. But —"

"She is not at home, then?" exclaimed Meagles, his heart sinking within him as that monosyllabic antithesis to hope fell upon his ears.

"No, sir," replied young Melmoth. "She went out at about half-past nine o'clock, and we've been very anxious concerning her ever since. We're afraid she has fallen into some trouble, because she went to see a gentleman who father says is connected with the Prince of Wales."

"That is Mr. Meagles, eh?" observed Tim.

"Yes, sir, the same," was the answer.

"Well, show me up-stairs, my boy," said Meagles, after a few moments' reflection. "I should like to say a word or two to your father. I suppose he is at home?"

"He has been in about ten minutes, sir," replied the youth.

Meagles entered the house, closing the door behind him. The lad led the way up-stairs, and Meagles followed in the total darkness which prevailed. At length, on reaching the top story, the boy threw open a door, and the visitor entered the garret, where the Melmoth family were grouped around the chest on which there were loaves of bread, cold meat, and cheese.

But the instant that Melmoth caught sight of the countenance of Meagles, horror and dismay spread over his own features, and, dropping the food which he was in the act of conveying to his mouth, he staggered back against the wall. At the same moment something dropped from about his person; and the object fell upon the floor with a metallic sound accompanied by the smashing of glass.

"Great Heaven! what do I behold?" ejaculated Meagles, springing forward and picking up the object alluded to. "My watch!" and he held it up by the chain, with amazement and indignation depicted upon his countenance.

A scream burst from the lips of Mrs. Melmoth, as this

incident carried to her soul, with the vividness of lightning, the conviction that her husband's temporary absence that night had been marked by a deed stamping him as a criminal.

The elder boy likewise comprehended the meaning of this scene respecting the watch, and his grief burst forth in piteous lamentations; while the other children, alarmed at what they could not, however, understand, flew to their mother with cries of terror and anguish.

For she had fallen upon her knees, clasping her poor babe to her bosom; and her eyes wandered wildly from the countenance of her husband to that of Meagles.

And Melmoth himself? How did he feel? How did he look?

Guilt was written upon every feature of his face and stamped upon every lineament. Guilt was expressed in his quailing attitude, his trembling form. The whole being of the wretched man was guilt personified.

He had not the hardihood to repeat the account that he had given his wife of the way in which he had obtained the means to purchase the food he had brought home with him and to pay the arrears of rent. He was not so proficient in turpitude as to be enabled to renew and persist in the tale which he had forged to lull asleep the appalling suspicions that had naturally sprung up in the woman's mind, in the first instance, when she saw her husband return with provisions and money. No, he could not put a bold front upon matters now. The watch, which he had concealed about his person, became the damning evidence against him; and, suddenly rendered a coward by the discovery of his enormity, the unhappy Melmoth stood in the presence of Meagles like a prisoner awaiting his doom from the lips of a judge.

We have already stated that the first sentiment which seized upon Meagles was one of mingled amazement and indignation; but, as the scream of the wife and the cries of the children smote his ear, his heart relented, and he instantly comprehended the entire truth.

"My good woman," he hastened to exclaim, as he turned toward the poor emaciated mother who had fallen upon her knees in indescribable anguish, "fear nothing. I will not harm your husband, I pardon him."

"God bless you, God bless you, kind gentleman!" murmured the woman, in a tone of such grateful fervour, such

plaintive earnestness, that Meagles felt he never could have forgiven himself if he had promptly taken that harsh step which so many in his situation would have adopted. "May God Almighty bless you, sir!" she repeated, her voice gathering more energy from the enthusiasm of her manner. "Children, down upon your knees, and thank this good gentleman for sparing your father, for saving you also from a disgrace which Heaven grant that you do not understand."

And the children knelt around Meagles, and Melmoth himself burst into a perfect agony of weeping.

Solemnly and sublimely interesting was this scene; for there was the scapegrace adventurer receiving the homage due to the good deed which he had done toward the poor working man whom the bitterness of penury had driven to crime.

"Now let us know each other better, my worthy friend," said Meagles, hastening to raise the woman and her children. Then, taking Melmoth's hand, he observed, "I can understand the whole truth of the incidents of this night as plainly as if I had just read them in a book. You need not utter a word of explanation. This room tells your tale with a too terrible fidelity," he added, glancing hastily around upon the naked walls; "and if any chapter were deficient in the narrative of woe and suffering, it may be found in the emaciated features of your wife and children. Not for worlds, therefore, would I injure you. I cannot even blame you. By Heaven, I would do the same sooner than see those whom I love perishing by inches. And now let me tell you that the gold which you have about you was actually intended to relieve you."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Melmoth, sobbing like a child.

"It is true, I can assure you," was the response; "and my name is Meagles."

"Oh, what strange incidents have occurred this night!" ejaculated the working man. "But Miss Foster — Ah! something strikes me — My God! a lady was with you in the square, and she fled precipitately, rending the air with her screams —"

"Descend not into explanations which may become too intelligible," said Meagles, glancing significantly toward

the children. "But tell me, do you think that Miss Foster recognized you?"

"No, I am certain she did not," answered Melmoth. "God forbid!" he cried, in a tone of almost wild excitement. "I am already sufficiently humbled and miserable enough, without having that crushing idea to overwhelm me altogether. But is it possible, sir, that anything can have happened to that excellent young lady?"

"I am seriously, very seriously alarmed on her account," said Meagles. "When I came back to consciousness, she was gone. I searched for her in the square, but vainly. What can have become of the poor orphan whom misfortunes appear to pursue and persecute with unremitting rancour?"

"Let us go forth and search for her, sir," exclaimed Melmoth.

"It is useless," observed Meagles. "Where can we search? Let us rather hope that some kind persons have given her an asylum for the night, and that to-morrow morning we shall receive gladdening intelligence respecting her."

"God send that such may prove the case!" cried Melmoth.

"I shall now leave you," said Meagles; "but I shall not lose sight of you. As to what has occurred, think no more of it. Poverty engenders much which deserves pity rather than blame; and the good reputation of years must not be considered ruined by the madness of a moment. Farewell for the present, and may better days await you. You will soon see me again."

And without waiting for a renewed outpouring of the fervent thanks of the Melmoth family, Meagles hastened away. The eldest lad followed him down to the door, and ere Tim could succeed in quitting the house, that grateful boy had seized his hand, pressed it to his lips, and covered it with his tears.

CHAPTER XLIX

STAMFORD MANOR

THE incidents of our tale follow each other in rapid succession; and the stage of our drama is crowded with characters and busy with action. But busier still, if possible, is it shortly destined to become; and of a deeper and more exciting interest are the events which yet remain to be told.

All that is most horrible in respect to crime, most pathetic and touching in the sphere of love, most terrible with regard to the oppression sustained by the poor at the hands of the rich, and most startling or riveting, enthralling or attractive, in reference to variety of incident, — all these features have yet more fully to develop themselves in the progress of our narrative.

To scenes more strange than any yet depicted will the reader have to be introduced; through the maze of adventures still more mysterious and exciting than those already recorded will he have to accompany us.

As the subject grows upon us, our energies appear to take the colossal proportions adequate to the task of elaborating it; our imagination expands commensurately with the labour which it has to perform.

To accumulate incident upon incident, with a rapidity which flags not, may appear to many the Titanian toil of heaping Ossa upon Pelion, mount upon mountain; but to us it is a task fraught with its own exciting pleasure.

And so will it seem to us until the end.

We must now request our readers to accompany us to Stamford Manor, which, as stated in the first chapter of this history, was situated at a distance of about three miles from Aylesbury.

It was a handsome building, of imposing appearance

externally, and splendidly fitted up within; and the fire which had occurred simultaneously with the appalling tragedy wherein Lady Stamford played the terrible part of the guilty heroine, had not achieved any considerable amount of damage.

On the same night when the incidents just related took place, and at about nine o'clock, a post-chaise drove up to the door of Stamford Manor, and Mr. Page, leaping forth, assisted his wife to descend.

Having dismissed the vehicle, which was hired at Aylesbury, the worthy couple entered the hall; and Mr. Page, addressing the old woman who had admitted them into the mansion, said, "You, I presume, are the person left in charge of the premises?"

"Yes, sir, my name is Bryan," was the answer, accompanied by a low curtsy. "I dessay Sir Richard told you to inquire for Mrs. Bryan, didn't he? Leastways, I should think it most likely that he did —"

"My good woman," interrupted Mr. Page, "I can perceive at once that you are disposed to be garrulous, and there's nothing I like less than garrulity. Your master has written to you, stating that a gentleman and lady would call here this evening, eh?"

And as Mr. Page gave utterance to the word "lady," he glanced complaisantly toward Julia, who was decked out in all the flaunting colours which the worst possible taste could have managed to accumulate.

"Yes, sir," answered Mrs. Bryan; "Sir Richard honoured me with a letter — leastways, with a note — which the postman brought over this morning from Aylesbury; or I should say the postboy, by rights, for he's a mere lad of some sixteen, or so —"

"Never mind how old he is, Mrs. Bryan," exclaimed Mr. Page. "He brought you the letter safe, and that's all we have to care about. But this letter duly informed you that a certain Mr. Page and his lady would probably call here in the evening, — is it not so?"

"Yes, sir, and that you would pass the night here," returned the woman; "and I was to mind and make you as comfortable as possible. So I've got you a nice roast fowl for your supper, and put clean sheets on the best bed."

"Well and good," said the ex-commercial traveller. "I

perceive that it becomes altogether unnecessary to inform you that I am Mr. Page," he continued, pompously, "and that this lady is my lady, or, in vulgar terms, my wife. How long will supper be before it's ready?"

"Half an hour, sir," was the answer; "leastways, three-quarters, at the outside, 'cause there's a bit of ham a-biling to eat with the fowl."

"Well, then," said Mr. Page, in a musing tone, as he turned toward his wife, who had been admiring the statues and vases in the marble hall while the preceding colloquy took place between her husband and the ancient domestic, "I think we may as well commence our work this evening. At all events, I should like to sort and seal up the papers to-night."

"What's to prevent us?" demanded Julia. "You have heard that there's three-quarters of an hour till supper-time, and we may do a great deal in that interval. For, mind you, I don't mean to sleep in this house to-morrow night. It's enough, in all conscience, to sleep here one night, with the reputation that the place has got."

"Oh, that's all nonsense, Julia," exclaimed Mr. Page. "I only wish Sir Richard would make you and me a present of the manor on condition that we must live in it nine months out of every year. I don't think we should forfeit possession let it be ever so desperately haunted."

"Haunted indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Bryan, catching at the word as a new pivot whereon her garrulity had an opportunity of turning. "There's no doubt about its being haunted. Why, after the terrible business took place, and her ladyship died, the servants left, one after another, 'cause it was soon knowed that the sperret of her ladyship walked —"

"Trash! nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Page. "An enlightened man — gentleman, I mean — like me, scorns such silly notions. But how happens it that if her ladyship walks, as you call it, how happens it, I should like to know, that you have courage enough to live all alone in the house?"

"Not exactly all alone, sir," replied Mrs. Bryan; "'cause my husband's with me, and he takes care of the grounds. But if we wasn't poor people and glad to earn an honest penny anyhow, I'm sure we shouldn't have undertook the charge of the manor when the regular servants — house-

keeper, gardener, footmen, cook, maids, and all — deserted it in the fashion they did. Leastways — ”

“ Pray cease to inflict your ‘leastways’ upon us, my good woman,” said the pragmatical Mr. Page; “and tell us honestly and truly whether you ever saw the ghost of her ladyship? ”

“ I can’t say that I ever seed anything, sir,” answered Mrs. Bryan; “but I’ve heerd a many strange noises which has quite freezed the blood in my veins and made my ’air stand up — ”

“ Why, you arrant old humbug,” ejaculated Mr. Page, “you wear a wig! How can you look me in the face, and talk about your hair standing on end? I suppose you will be telling us next that your teeth chattered?” he added, the point of his remark existing in the fact that the ancient dame had no teeth at all.

“ Well, sir, I didn’t mean no offence,” she said, with a good humour that was imperturbable. “When I spoke of my ’air standing on end, it was what I’ve heerd called a figger of speech, or something of that kind. But, raly and truly, me and my husband have heerd strange noises at times; and if it wasn’t an object to us to live rent-free, have the use of the wegitable, and ten shillings a week into the bargain, with the chance of being retained in the service of them as becomes the owners of the estate after the sale, — if it wasn’t for all this, I was saying, we shouldn’t remain here no longer, or yet have stayed so long.”

“ Then you know that the manor and the park are to be sold by private contract, eh? ” said Page.

“ To be sure, sir. A many gentlemen and ladies has been to look at it. They tell us that the sale’s to take place next week,” said Mrs. Bryan. “ I don’t know how true the report may be.”

“ It is quite true,” observed Mr. Page. “ Sir Richard Stamford feels that he can never live here again after all that has occurred, and he wants to dispose of the place as soon as possible. Next week, as you have been informed, the sale will most probably be accomplished. I and my lady are intimate friends of Sir Richard’s — indeed, I may say we are bosom friends,” continued the ex-traveller, pompously; “and he has testified his regard for us by honouring us with his confidence on the present occasion. For I suppose

you are aware of our purpose in visiting the manor, my good woman?"

"Sir Richard tells my husband and me in his letter that you're going to take away all the papers and wallybles —"

"Say valuables, if you please," interrupted Mr. Page; "it is more classical."

"Well, how much longer is this nonsense going to continue?" asked Julia. "If you mean to look over the papers this evening, we had better begin at once."

"True, my dear spouse," observed Mr. Page. "Now, my good woman, have the kindness to conduct us to the study or library, as the case may be, and if you get supper ready in about three-quarters of an hour, it will be time enough. We will attend to business first, and enjoy ourselves afterward."

Mrs. Bryan lighted a parlour-lamp by means of the candle which she carried in her hand; and she then led the way to the library. Placing the lamp on a handsome desk which stood in the room, she would have renewed the conversation with all the pertinacity of her garrulous temperament, had not Julia unceremoniously bade her retire, an order which she obeyed with perfect good humour and a low curtsy.

Mr. Page deposited his hat and cloak on a chair, while Julia likewise laid aside her bonnet and mantle; and, having taken a rapid survey of the apartment and its numerous shelves filled with elegantly bound books, they proceeded to inspect the contents of the desk, the keys of which the ex-traveller had in his possession.

"You remember," said Mrs. Page, "that all the correspondence which ever passed between Sir Richard and the bankers is to be preserved."

"I have forgotten none of the instructions which the baronet gave us, my dear," returned Page. "You are quite right: the letters you mention are to be preserved, in case they should be wanted for the winding up of the affairs of the bank. Well, it's a lucky thing for Sir Richard that he will have saved from the wreck of his property so much more than he at first anticipated. It made me quite happy to see him in such good spirits yesterday at Windsor. But what is that bundle of papers you have just taken out of the little drawer there?" demanded Mr. Page of his wife.

“ ‘Correspondence with my Eleanor,’ ” answered Julia, reading the endorsement.

“ That is to be burned, the whole of it,” exclaimed Page. “ Untie the bundle and scatter the letters in the grate; they will take the flames more easily in that fashion. And here is another bundle destined to share the same fate: it is endorsed ‘Miscellaneous.’ By the bye, wasn’t it a strange thing that Sir Richard was walking with the Princess Amelia in Windsor Park yesterday? She is really a sweet pretty young lady. There is something quite royal about her, and even before that park-keeper whom we questioned told us who she was, I had an instinctive presentiment that she was of high birth.”

“ Of high nonsense!” exclaimed Julia, who was busily engaged in burning the condemned correspondence. “ How can one woman be so different from another as all that? ”

“ I didn’t mean to pay you any ill compliment, Julia, my love,” returned Mr. Page. “ No odious comparisons, you know, for you’re a very pretty and genteel young woman — lady, I meant to say — and ought to be a princess. But I was observing that Sir Richard was walking with the princess in the park, when we went in search of him — ”

“ And he did not appear overwell pleased that we accosted him while he was with her Royal Highness,” interrupted Mrs. Page, returning to the table on which her husband was scattering and sorting the correspondence. “ Now, which heap is to be burned, and which preserved? ”

“ Take these and throw them into the grate,” replied the ex-traveller. “ The greater portion is to be destroyed, I see. Strange that Sir Richard Stamford himself should have such an unconquerable aversion to visit the manor.”

“ Not strange at all,” observed Julia, “ seeing that his wife killed herself within its walls, and that such a mass of misfortunes all fell upon the poor dear gentleman’s head at the same moment. It would be far more strange if he thought of ever living here again. But I have cleared away the heap that you put aside to be burned. Are there no more papers for the flames? ”

“ Patience, my dear, patience,” said the ex-traveller. “ I am not quite sure whether we have thoroughly examined this desk. It is an old-fashioned piece of furniture, and there may be secret drawers, or what not.”

"If there were, Sir Richard Stamford would have told you so," observed Julia. "But as he said nothing at all of the kind, you may be sure that there are none. Now, do make haste and leave off fiddling about those little drawers. What is the use of pulling them all out in that manner?" she demanded, impatiently.

"Because, my dear, I suspect that there is a secret recess in this piece of furniture," answered Page, in a mysterious tone. "Sir Richard Stamford may not know anything about it; but I am rather a shrewd and far-seeing man, my love, and the more I examine the arrangements of this desk, the more I am convinced that there is some curious contrivance about it. Look at the places into which these drawers fit; they don't go close up to the board at the back. That's quite clear. But here is a sort of false back — Heydey!" he suddenly exclaimed, and at the same moment that the ejaculation burst from his lips, the sharp, abrupt, clicking sound of a spring giving way startled his wife.

"What is it?" she demanded, hurrying close up to the desk.

"Just what I expected, and no more than I thought," responded Page, joyously. "A secret recess, my love! A private compartment, my dear! Look, the false back to the desk has started out of its setting. Who was right in his suspicions, eh?"

And the ex-traveller chuckled with glee.

"Come, let us examine it," said Mrs. Page, thrusting her hand into the recess; but she instantly drew it out again all covered over with the dust that had accumulated therein.

"By Jove! the secret compartment must have remained unused for a length of time," exclaimed the ex-traveller. "Depend upon it, we are in luck's way. Our vocation seems to be the discovery of important documents regarding other people's business."

Thus speaking, Mr. Page tucked up his coat-sleeve and laced wristband, and thrust his hand into the recess.

"Papers, by jingo!" he exclaimed, drawing forth a bundle of letters much soiled by dust, and tied around with a faded ribbon. "But let us see whether there is any endorsement."

And having wiped off the dust, he approached the bundle to the lamp in such a manner that the light streamed full upon it. His wife looked over his shoulder; and their

countenances expanded with joy at the same moment, as their eyes deciphered the following lines written at the back of the letter which was uppermost in the packet:

Correspondence between Miss Hannah Lightfoot
and Lady Stamford,
Together with Important Memoranda and Explanatory
Comments,
In the Years 1757-1758.

"That must be the former Lady Stamford, the wife of Sir William!" exclaimed Page. "Depend upon it, Julia, my dear, these documents contain startling intelligence of some kind or other. Perhaps respecting the birth —"

At this moment the door of the library was opened, and a man with his hat on and enveloped in a cloak, appeared upon the threshold.

Mr. Page and his wife turned their eyes upon him at the same instant; and simultaneously also did ejaculations of terror burst from their lips, while their features became convulsed with horror, and the packet of papers fell from the hand of the ex-traveller.

For the countenance which thus met their startled, shuddering view and sent the blood with a chill of ice to their hearts was that of Ramsey, who had been hung at the debtors' door of Newgate!

Could they be mistaken? No, another look convinced them that those indeed were the features so indelibly impressed upon their memories; and, with yet louder and wilder cries, they precipitated themselves from the room by a second door opening at the farther extremity.

Away they sped in total darkness along a passage; crash they came against a door, which the violence of the concussion forced open, a light streamed upon their eyes, a shriek saluted their ears, and from their own tongues thrilled the awful alarm of "A ghost! a ghost!"

CHAPTER L

ARRIVALS AT THE MANOR

THE fact was that the room into which Mr. and Mrs. Page thus suddenly burst was the one occupied by Mrs. Bryan and her husband, and where this worthy couple were at the moment partaking of a salubrious and frugal supper of bread and cheese, onions, and home-brewed ale. The shriek emanated from Mrs. Bryan, who was terribly startled at the violent and unceremonious manner in which the door was thrown open; and Mr. and Mrs. Page explained the cause of their own alarm by giving vent to the ejaculation of "A ghost! a ghost!"

Mr. Bryan, the gardener, who was an old man with a face as red and shrivelled as a windfall pippin, bounded from his seat, caught up the poker, and threw a fierce look around, as much as to imply that the ghost had better mind what it was about. His wife set up a piteous moaning, interspersed with such expressions as "Deary me! deary me!" and "Lauk-a-day! what will become of us?" while Mrs. Page sank exhausted upon a chair, and her husband cast a rapid and frightened look behind, to ascertain whether any hideous spectre was in pursuit of them.

But observing nothing, Mr. Page became a trifle more courageous; and, mustering up valour enough to shut the door, he said to the gardener, "Put down the poker, my good man; the spirit has not followed us, and even if he had, it would be of no use to take up the fire-irons against him."

Mr. Bryan accordingly replaced the poker on the hearth, and resumed his seat, saying, "What was it you thought you saw, sir?"

"Thought!" ejaculated Page, completely bewildered.

"By Heaven! there was no thinking in the matter! I am not inclined to superstition, I never believed in ghosts till now, but this adventure has altogether staggered me."

And the ex-traveller began to pace the room in an agitated manner.

"What was it you saw, ma'am?" inquired the gardener, now appealing to Mrs. Page for an explanation.

"Oh, don't talk to me about it," exclaimed Julia, trembling violently from head to foot; "it makes me shudder merely to think of it."

"Deary me! deary me!" moaned Mrs. Bryan, rocking herself to and fro upon her seat; "what can it all mean? Leastways, what is it all about? If it was only a chimbley falling, we should have heerd it, or a cat breaking a winder —"

"No, it could not have been imagination," cried Page, stopping suddenly short alike in his agitated walk and his bewildered reflections. "But let us put the matter to the test. Julia, my dear, what was it you thought you saw?"

"Ramsey, who was hanged," replied the young woman, casting around looks of unspeakable terror.

"Exactly what I fancied," exclaimed the ex-traveller, feeling that his flesh was creeping upon his bones and his blood running chill in his veins.

"Deary me! deary me!" moaned Mrs. Bryan, more piteously than ever.

"The ghost of Ramsey as was hanged!" murmured the old gardener, with a visible shudder.

"It was indeed," said Page, in a musing tone; "and yet this is almost incredible. I am not superstitious, as I just now observed; but what can I think? Either that the fellow has come to life again, or that his spirit haunts the place which is so closely connected with his crimes."

And again did Mr. Page walk to and fro with nervous agitation visible in his manner and depicted upon his countenance.

"You didn't bring the papers away with you?" said Julia. "Those papers — you know which I mean," she added, significantly.

"No, I dropped them, in the confusion of the moment," answered Page. "But they are worth looking after, and, by

Jove! I'll venture back into the library, ghost or no ghost. Will anybody come with me?"

"Deary me, not I!" ejaculated Mrs. Bryan; and, looking toward her husband, she said, "Can't you go with the gen'leman instead of sitting there like an old fool?"

"Yes, come with me," said Page. Then, tossing down a guinea upon the table, he observed, "There! will that inspire you with courage, my good fellow?"

The gardener picked up the money, put it into his waistcoat pocket, and, rising slowly from his seat, intimated his readiness to follow the ex-traveller to the library.

Mrs. Page sat fast in her chair, and her husband did not think it worth while to solicit her company; but taking a candle from the table, he led the way along the passage, old Bryan keeping close to his heels.

On reaching the door whence he and his wife had so precipitately escaped from the library, Mr. Page perceived that it was wide open just as it had been left; and, summoning all his courage to his aid, he advanced to the threshold. The hurried and indeed fearful glance which he threw into the apartment showed him in a moment that no one was there; and, considerably relieved, he entered with a comparatively firm step, the old gardener still following and gathering confidence from the fact that nothing terrible was to be seen.

Advancing toward the desk, Mr. Page looked anxiously about for the papers which he had discovered in the secret recess, and which contained the "correspondence between Miss Hannah Lightfoot and Lady Stamford;" but the packet was nowhere to be found. Vainly did he search amongst the documents scattered about, vainly did he go upon all fours and examine underneath the furniture. That particular collection of letters had disappeared.

"Well, this is most extraordinary," muttered the bewildered Page to himself. "I am not so foolish as to imagine that a ghost would walk off with a parcel of papers. No, no, it was not a spirit, it was a living man; but whether Ramsey himself, resuscitated by some wondrous and unaccountable means, or a person as like him as two peas, it is impossible to determine. Perdition seize it! the papers which would have perhaps made my fortune have been snatched from my grasp."

But scarcely had the ex-traveller reached this point in his

musings, when he was suddenly interrupted by a loud knocking and ringing at the front door of the mansion.

"Who can that be?" exclaimed the old gardener. "Sir Richard, perhaps —"

"No such thing!" cried Page. "The baronet is at Windsor, and will never set foot in this house again, I am very certain, after all that has happened. But come along, I will go with you to see who it is; for remember," he added, with pompous self-sufficiency, "I represent Sir Richard Stamford during my brief sojourn beneath this roof."

"Just as you like, sir," returned Bryan, who had no ambition to dispute the honour with the important, conceited, and bustling Mr. Page.

They accordingly hurried to the front door; and, the moment it was opened, a lady and gentleman entered the hall without any ceremony. Mr. Page's eyes first sought the countenance of the former, for he was a great admirer of the fair sex; and the dazzling beauty which met his view completely riveted his gaze for several moments. But on turning his looks upon the features of the gentleman to whose arm she clung, an ejaculation of mingled surprise and confusion burst from the lips of the ex-bagman, for he instantaneously recognized the Prince of Wales.

Meantime the gardener, fancying that he beheld his master, Sir Richard Stamford, was making sundry awkward bows and pulling his forelock in token of respect; while the prince himself, taking no notice whatsoever of the old man, kept his eyes fixed on Mr. Page, racking his memory to discover who he was. For the ex-traveller's features were quite familiar to his Royal Highness, who could not, however, for the life of him recollect at the moment where he had seen that thin, sallow, angular face before.

It was quite clear, however, to the prince that he was recognized by this individual; and, not relishing the manner in which he was now being stared at, he said, somewhat sharply, "What is your name, sir? Who are you?"

"My name is Page, at your Royal Highness's service," was the response; "and if your Royal Highness will remember a certain night at the George and Blue Boar —"

"Ah! by Heaven! I recollect," cried the prince, his face suddenly flushing with indignation. "You are the insolent scoundrel who dared to address me in a most familiar and

presumptuous manner, and to follow me with a pertinacity as unaccountable as it was rude. What did you mean by it, sirrah, and who are you? ”

“ I humbly beseech the pardon of your Royal Highness,” said Mr. Page, bowing and scraping with the utmost deference, “ but the little affair referred to is easily explained. The truth is, that at the time when the incident took place a reward was offered for the apprehension of Sir Richard Stamford, and the extraordinary likeness which your Royal Highness bears to the baronet led me to mistake — ”

“ Oh, now I understand it all,” ejaculated the prince, unable to suppress a laugh at Mr. Page’s expense. “ But I thought you were a commercial traveller. What are you doing at Stamford Manor? ”

“ I have retired from ‘ the road,’ may it please your Royal Highness,” answered Page; “ and having recently formed the acquaintance and now enjoying the friendship and confidence of Sir Richard Stamford — ”

“ After endeavouring to capture him for the sake of the reward, eh? ” exclaimed the prince, darting a look of contempt on the ex-bagman.

“ Your Royal Highness must not view my conduct harshly, without knowing all the particulars,” said Page, gravely. “ It was I who enabled the baronet to escape from the custody in which certain villains held him, as well as to prove his own innocence and bring Ramsey and Martin to the scaffold. For the present, I am Sir Richard’s representative here, and if I can do anything to testify my devotion toward your Royal Highness — ”

“ Well, the truth is,” interrupted the prince, “ I need the hospitality of this house to-night for myself and this lady,” he added, glancing toward his lovely companion.

“ Heavens! and I have kept your Royal Highness standing all this time in the hall, and the lady too!” ejaculated Page. “ Deign to walk this way.”

And, throwing open a door at random, for, be it recollected, he himself was almost a complete stranger at the manor, he stood bowing and scraping near the threshold while the prince and the lady passed into the room, which happened to be the very one where a fire was already lighted and the supper-table laid in readiness for the behoof of the ex-bagman and Julia.

"Run and tell your wife, and my wife, too," whispered Page, hurriedly, to the old gardener, "that the Prince of Wales and a lady are here, and that they must bustle about and get the best supper they can. Come, look alive!" added the ex-bagman, sharply, seeing that Bryan was staring at him in stupid amazement.

Indeed, throughout the preceding dialogue between the prince and Mr. Page the old man had stood in speechless wonder, gazing first at the former, then at the latter, and then at the lady; for that conversation had made him aware of the astounding fact that it was not his master, Sir Richard Stamford, whom he saw before him, and on whom he had been lavishing his best bows and salutations, but a "Royal Highness," a real, living, veritable "Royal Highness;" and now he learned, to his increased awe and amazement, that this personage was none other than the Prince of Wales, the heir apparent to the British throne.

But upon being so sharply commanded by Mr. Page to "look alive," old Bryan felt as if he were suddenly galvanized into all the alacrity of his departed youthfulness; and hurrying off to the room where his wife and Mrs. Page were seated together, conversing about the apparition of Ramsey, he communicated to them the startling intelligence that the Prince of Wales and a lady had sought the hospitality of Stamford Manor for the night.

CHAPTER LI

A NIGHT AT STAMFORD MANOR

IN the meantime the Prince of Wales and the lady had entered the parlour and seated themselves near the hearth. The former laid aside his hat and upper coat, the latter, her bonnet and furs; and they both seemed to enjoy the cheerful influence of the fire.

The lady was approaching toward forty, but, as we have already stated, she was endowed with a ravishing beauty. Her auburn hair was of exceeding richness and luxuriance; her eyes were of a deep hazel, and indescribably melting in expression. She was largely, that is, finely formed; but though her bosom rose in a superb swell, yet was her waist of wasplike symmetry, and her long arching neck and sweeping length of limb, combined with all the classic elegance of gait and gesture, imparted an air of graceful majesty to her entire appearance.

Having dismissed the old gardener in the manner already described, Mr. Page bustled about to light the lamps upon the table and the wax candles on the mantel. He then heaped more logs upon the fire, gave a glance at the table to satisfy himself that it was laid in a becoming manner, and, in fine, afforded every indication of an intense anxiety to make himself as useful as possible to the royal visitor and his fair companion. For visions of knighthood, pensions, and sinecures were already floating in the imagination of the ex-bagman, who never missed a chance of turning particular incidents and favourable occurrences as much as possible to his own special advantage. Indeed, as the reader is already aware, he constantly had an eye fixed upon the "main chance," and never beheld anything unusual happen with-

out instantaneously setting his wits to work to render the adventure beneficial to himself.

"May it please your Royal Highness," said Mr. Page, when he had poked his nose into every nook in the apartment to assure himself that nothing remained to be done for the comfort of the guests, "I have ordered that such refreshments as the house will afford at the moment shall be immediately got ready; and I am now waiting to receive any commands which your Royal Highness may have to give your humble servitor."

"I have little to say, Mr. Page," responded the prince, with a smile, "unless it be to thank you for your zeal in our behalf. The fact is," he added, laconically, as if thinking that some little explanation was necessary, but nevertheless giving it with the brevity and haughty curtness of an habitual reserve, "the fact is that an accident which happened close by to our carriage has compelled us to demand the hospitality of this mansion for the night. I am aware that it belongs to Sir Richard Stamford; but I presume, from certain observations which have fallen from your lips, that he is not here at the present time. Our acknowledgments are therefore due to you, as Sir Richard's representative, and I shall feel obliged if you will order a chamber to be provided for our accommodation."

The latter portion of this sentence was delivered in a low tone and aside to the ear of the bagman, who, with characteristic keenness of perception, instantly comprehended that the prince and his fair companion would occupy the same sleeping-room. With an obsequious bow, therefore, he retreated from the parlour, and hastened to rejoin his wife and the Bryans, whom he found all busily employed in making such preparations for the royal supper as time and materials allowed.

The excitement caused by the arrival of the prince and a lady of extraordinary beauty almost entirely banished the affair of the ghost from the minds of those who were now bustling about to serve up a repast worthy of the distinguished guests. Fortunately there were the roast fowl and boiled ham which Mrs. Bryan had already spoken of; and Julia, assisted by an old cookery-book which happened to be at hand, hastily prepared some sweets, there being plenty of jams and preserved-fruits in the storeroom. The cellar

furnished a supply of excellent wine; and thus the arrangements were completed to the satisfaction of Mr. Page, who superintended them all.

Then, assisted by his wife, — for he would not permit the Bryans to take any share in this portion of the ceremony, as he unceremoniously told them that their hands were too brown and grimy-looking, — the ex-bagman carried the dishes to the parlour and served them up with all the pomp and circumstance which he deemed appropriate to the occasion. The prince and his fair companion sat down to the repast for which the night air had sharpened their appetites; and while Mr. Page stationed himself behind the chair of the former, Julia took her post in a similar position with regard to the latter. Indeed, if the bagman had been all his life accustomed to the duties of a butler, he could not have acquitted himself more ably in that respect; and his wife, being pleased at having an opportunity of gratifying a vulgar predilection for gazing her fill upon royalty, likewise endeavoured to render her services as acceptable as possible. The prince and the lady conversed together upon indifferent subjects during the repast; but the former never once addressed the latter by any name, so that neither Page nor Julia obtained the slightest knowledge who she was. That she was, however, one of the heir apparent's numerous favourites, they entertained not the least doubt; and that she was of the highest class of society they likewise felt assured.

When the cloth was removed and Julia had retired, Mr. Page arranged upon the table the decanters of wine and several dishes of preserved fruits, apples, and filberts; and having replenished the hearth with fresh logs, he was about to leave the room, when the prince said, "I presume that Sir Richard Stamford has broken up his establishment here since the terrible occurrences to which the newspapers have given publicity?"

"Such is the fact, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Page. "For some time past there has only been an old couple in the house to take care of it; and I and my wife came here this evening to look over the baronet's private papers, preparatory to the sale which is to take place next week."

"I believe that the manor was partially destroyed by

fire, was it not?" said the lady, now addressing herself to the ex-bagman for the first time during the evening.

"A fire did occur, madam," replied Page, quite delighted by the winning condescension of her manner and the dulcet music of her voice; "but it did little harm and was speedily extinguished. The effects are scarcely visible outside, and are chiefly confined, I fancy, to the room where the fire occurred."

"The two Aylesbury bankers, Sir Richard's partners, were both executed, I believe, were they not?" inquired the prince.

"They were, your Royal Highness," answered the traveller. "But whether or not one of them managed to come to life again, or whether his spirit haunts these premises, I cannot say. Certain it is, however, that both my wife and myself saw Mr. Ramsey this very evening in the library, as plainly as I have now the honour to behold your Royal Highness."

"It would only require the circumstance of our taking refuge in a haunted house to render the romance of our adventure complete," observed the prince, addressing himself with a significant smile to the lady, who laughed and blushed at the same time.

"Your Royal Highness will, of course, be inclined to treat my story with disbelief, and perhaps with contempt," pursued Page; "but I can assure your Royal Highness that if it were not Ramsey whom I and my wife saw this evening, it was some one so exceedingly like him that even the resemblance which Sir Richard Stamford bears to your Royal Highness is excelled and outvied in this instance. And as a proof that imagination had nothing to do with the affair, I must beg to add that Mrs. Page and I were both struck with the conviction that it was Ramsey before we had even exchanged an idea or questioned each other as to our respective impressions concerning what we did see."

"But as a sensible man, Mr. Page," said the heir apparent, "you do not actually and positively believe that you have seen a ghost?"

"I should be sorry to declare most positively that I had, and I can scarcely bring myself to affirm that I have not," responded the ex-bagman. "I saw Ramsey executed, I saw him hang for the usual time, I saw him cut down —"

"And did you see him buried?" demanded the prince, with a smile; for he was in a particularly good humour on the present occasion, and Mr. Page's manner and discourse somewhat amused him.

"Well, to speak candidly, I did not see him buried," was the response to the question just put. "The corpse was claimed, as I understood, by some friends —"

"Oh, pray let us discontinue this topic!" exclaimed the lady, shuddering visibly. "I cannot bear to read or think of public executions and all the dread paraphernalia of the gibbet. Depend upon it, Mr. Page, you and your wife were the victims of some optical delusion, or else some practical joke —"

"Pardon me, madam," interrupted Page; "it could not be a delusion, for the reason I have already mentioned, and there was no one in the house at the time who would play us a trick. Ramsey was a man whose personal appearance could not fail to produce an impression upon the mind. Once seen, he was not likely to be forgotten."

"He was very handsome, I believe?" observed the prince. "At least, so the newspapers said."

"And they spoke truly, may it please your Royal Highness," returned Mr. Page, who, however much he disliked garrulity in others, was terribly prone to it himself. "Mr. Ramsey was about eight and twenty, tall in stature, slightly but elegantly made, with features perfectly regular and of a Grecian cast, splendid dark eyes, brilliant teeth, and an olive complexion."

"It was almost a pity to give such a man up to the hangman," observed the prince. "But we will discontinue the subject now, if you please," he added, at the same time giving a gentle inclination of his head as a hint that Mr. Page might withdraw.

The ex-traveller accordingly hastened to rejoin his wife and the Bryans; and when he entered the room where they were, he found them busily engaged in examining something which Julia was holding close to the candle. So deeply absorbed were they in the contemplation of the object of such enthralling interest, that they did not immediately observe the entrance of Mr. Page; and he had already thrust his head over his wife's shoulder to see what she had got in her hand, ere his presence was remarked. Then she gave a

sudden start, and the Bryans uttered ejaculations of terror, while Page caught a glimpse of a miniature portrait of Ramsey.

"Dear me, how you have frightened us!" cried Julia, petulantly. "What made you come creeping in so stealthily?"

"I didn't," answered Page. "'Twas your being so intent on this picture, that you could not hear my footsteps. Where did you get it?"

And as he asked this question, he took the miniature from Julia's hand and examined it with attention. The likeness was perfect; no one who had ever seen Ramsey even for a single moment could fail to be struck by the fidelity with which his features and the very expression of his countenance in his usual mood were depicted there.

The explanation demanded was speedily given.

"The bed-chamber which was originally prepared for us," said Julia, addressing herself to her husband, "is the best in the mansion; and I therefore resolved that it should be appropriated to the use of the prince and his lady. Well, then, it was necessary to get another room ready for you and me; and so Mrs. Bryan showed me through several chambers, that I might select the one I fancied. When I had made my choice, we began to arrange the bed; and, lo and behold! between the mattresses we found this miniature."

"Ah! it doubtless belonged to Lady Stamford," observed Page. "The resemblance to Ramsey is admirably preserved. It is a speaking likeness. No wonder that her ladyship should have loved him as she did; he was a very handsome man. But, by the bye," he ejaculated, a sudden thought striking him, "the prince has been talking to me about him, and I will just take the liberty of showing his Royal Highness this portrait."

To the presence of the heir apparent and the lady did Mr. Page accordingly return; and, with numerous apologies for his intrusion, he explained his motive by producing the miniature. Even in the minds of the well educated and the enlightened, there always exists a degree of interest — whether morbid or not, we leave our readers to determine — respecting those individuals who have gained an infamous renown alike by their crimes and the death whereby they have expiated them; and this fact will account for the

attention with which his Royal Highness now contemplated the portrait of Ramsey. Nor less did the lady exhibit a degree of interest in the examination of those features which were truly of that classic beauty described by the ex-bagman; and as she returned the picture to Mr. Page, she observed, "Crime is not written upon that countenance; not a single lineament denotes an evil propensity. Surely the phrenologist, who studies the features as an index to the mind, must often err?"

"Undoubtedly," answered the prince. "We thank you, Mr. Page, for your attention in bringing that portrait for our inspection; and for my part I must admit that it is indeed a countenance which, once seen, could not be easily forgotten. However, your ghost story will not prevent me from sleeping soundly to-night, for I am overcome with weariness, and we will therefore retire to rest."

Page bowed, thrust the miniature into his pocket, and withdrew for the purpose of sending Julia to conduct the heir apparent and his fair companion to the chamber prepared for their reception. Mrs. Page had already made herself acquainted with the arrangements of the mansion; and she was therefore enabled to act the part of guide to the distinguished visitors. Carrying a wax candle in each hand, she preceded them to their apartment, where she offered her assistance in respect to the night toilet of the lady, the prince retiring into the adjacent dressing-room; but the proposal was declined with a condescending smile and a few words of thanks, and Mrs. Page withdrew to the chamber prepared for herself and husband.

When this worthy couple were alone together, the ex-bagman did not immediately commence laying aside his apparel; but, flinging himself into a great armchair, he said, "I think, my dear Julia, that our attentions have made some impression upon his Royal Highness and that lady."

"Very probably," answered his wife, in a laconic manner. Then, after a few moments' silence, she added, "But if you ever hope to obtain anything from the prince's good nature, depend upon it you are wofully mistaken. He is notoriously the most ungrateful man alive. I wish we could find out who that lady is."

"Why so?" demanded Page.

"Simply because I have an idea that there's some little

intrigue or love-affair going on in that quarter, which we might turn to our own advantage," said Julia. "That lady wears a wedding-ring on her finger, and yet we know she is not the prince's wife. Besides, in the corner of her white cambric pocket-handkerchief there is a small coronet stamped in gold-leaf or something of the kind; and so I suppose she is a woman of high rank. I saw the coronet quite plain while I was standing behind her at dinner-time. And then, don't you think that if there wasn't some reason for keeping her name secret, the prince would have alluded to her otherwise than as 'this lady.' Of course he would."

"You are admirably sharp-witted, Julia," exclaimed Mr. Page, delighted with his wife's penetration. "These points that you have mentioned are very important indeed."

"To be sure they are," returned the young woman; "and if you could only find out who this lady is, there's no telling how many thousands of pounds we might get to bribe us to secrecy."

"But how can I manage? What do you suggest?" demanded Page.

"There's only one way that I know of," responded Julia; "and that is to listen at the door of their room. Ten to one but what you will be able to glean from their conversation something to put you on the right scent."

"By Jove! it shall be done," ejaculated the ex-traveller, bounding from his seat. "We have lost the precious documents containing the correspondence between your late kinswoman Hannah and Lady Stamford; but we won't let this new opportunity of feathering our nest slip through our fingers. Which is the room where the prince and his fair lady are to pass the night?"

"The second door on the other side of the passage," answered Julia.

"All right," said Page, putting off his shoes; then, carefully issuing from the chamber, he stole noiselessly along the corridor until he reached the vicinage of the prince's apartment. Julia stood holding the light at the threshold of her own room until she saw that her husband had reached the proper destination; she then withdrew, closing the door, so that a profound darkness now reigned in the passage.

And silence prevailed throughout the mansion.

But in a few minutes Mr. Page, whose ear was closely

applied to the keyhole, heard a door open within the chamber; and, rightly conceiving it to be a sign that the prince had emerged from the dressing-room adjoining, he now listened with a breathless attention. Nor did he long play the eaves-dropper in vain; for the prince and his fair companion began to converse.

"My dearest Georgiana," said his Royal Highness, "how superbly beautiful you appear to-night. Never were you more truly handsome in my eyes."

"Flatterer!" exclaimed the lady, with a laugh which resounded softly and deliciously merry as musical pearls; "into what temptation have you not led me? But, seriously speaking, my dear prince, do you really feel assured that there is no danger to be apprehended from the prying eyes of that conceited, forward, impudent man who thrust his attentions so officiously upon us?"

"Not the slightest, my beautiful Georgiana," answered his Royal Highness; and the murmurs of soft and billing kisses were wafted to the ears of Mr. Page, who had winced somewhat under the startling epithets which the lady, little suspecting he was so near, had lavished upon him.

"You are certain that he did not recognize me?" said Georgiana, after a short pause.

"Quite confident," responded the prince. "I watched him narrowly while he was first surveying you, which he did, by the bye, like an insolent rascal as he is; and I am sure that he no more suspects you to be the Duchess of Devonshire than I believe him to be the Emperor of China. No, my lovely Georgiana, make your mind perfectly easy upon that head. Had he known you, had he recognized you when we first entered this house, I should have instantly addressed you by your name and title, and then we should have been compelled to occupy separate chambers to-night. Oh, what a punishment that would have been to me, charming and fascinating creature that you are! But, gracious Heaven! what noise is that?" suddenly exclaimed his Royal Highness, in a tone of alarm.

And at the same instant a scream burst from the lips of the Duchess of Devonshire.

Page was riveted to the spot; his ear was nailed to the keyhole. He could not have run away, even if he had wished. The sound which had terrified the prince and duchess, what-

ever it might have been, was assuredly within the room, and not caused either by himself at the door or any one else outside. In fact, no noise of any kind reached Page's ear; and he was therefore completely ignorant of the cause of the alarm inside the apartment. And his curiosity and suspense were equal to his ignorance on this point.

But, hark! rapid and apparently angry whispering is going on within the chamber. Page holds his breath; a pin might be heard to drop in the passage, so fearful is he that even the rustling of his clothes should prevent him from catching an idea of what is progressing on the other side of that door. Vain, however, are his attempts, useless all his strainings to distinguish the words that are spoken. He can hear the voice of the prince, then that of the Duchess of Devonshire. The former speaks in anger, the latter in terror. And yet they are not addressing each other, nor quarrelling together. No, there is evidently a third person in that room!

The incidents which brought Mr. Page to this conviction all passed in the space of a minute, or rather, the whispering was characterized by that variety of intonation which caused the certainty to spring up in his mind that there was a third voice mingling therein. But this third individual, whoever it were, — and whether male or female Page knew not, — spoke in so low a key that it seemed merely the murmuring of the wind. Then the prince spoke again, then the Duchess of Devonshire, and then this third person interrupted them suddenly. Hark! the voice is louder now, it is a man's. Yes, there is no longer any doubt on that head; but the voice is not familiar to the eavesdropper. He does not recognize it. That it is not the gruff, coarse voice of the old gardener he, however, feels assured. Who, then, can the third person in that room be, and what is the meaning of this strange, romantic, and darkly mysterious incident?

Still does Mr. Page listen. He is bewildered, astounded. The thought of quitting his place at that door does not once enter his head; the probability that some one may suddenly issue forth never strikes him. He is absorbed, totally absorbed, in all that is passing within, or rather, in as much of it as he can comprehend.

And this, as far as the rapidly whispered discourse goes, is nothing at all. Not a single sentence can he distinguish, not a word can he catch. Vague and uncertain whisperings

rustle and murmur, as it were upon his ears; but their sense is lost to him, their meaning reaches him not. Now he knows that the prince is speaking, now he can tell that the Duchess of Devonshire has taken up the discourse, and then he is aware that the other individual is talking in his turn.

Thus does this strange trialogue continue for upwards of ten minutes. Page strains with all his moral energies, with all his vital powers, to catch the significance of the discourse. He moves not a limb, he stirs not a muscle, and yet he is struggling, as it were, with a desperate energy. The perspiration pours off him, although the night air in that long passage is icy cold. Oh, if he could only catch a sentence, a word, a syllable, it might afford him a key to all the rest. But, no, the whispering is continued rapidly and with excitement; an occasional ejaculation of wonder, anger, or terror — Page knows not which — bursts from the prince and the duchess, and then the third voice enjoins silence with a "Hush!" that rustles like a low wind amidst the dead leaves of the forest.

There is something awfully mysterious in all this, and by degrees a vague and undefined terror creeps over the eaves-dropper. The adventure in the library flashes back to his mind; in the midst of that deep darkness which envelops him he fears lest the cold hand of Ramsey's corpse should be suddenly laid upon him. Alarm grows on him rapidly. He cannot reason within himself against his augmenting terrors. The icy chill of superstitious dread circles around him, expands over his form, seizes on his entire being, penetrates to his very heart's core. He would rise from his kneeling posture, oh, he would rise and flee precipitately, but his limbs refuse to perform their office, he is frozen with horror that increases every moment; he feels like a statue of marble animated with the mind of a man.

At this crisis, when he felt as if his brain were beginning to reel, and he ceased to perceive whether the whispering inside the room was going on or not, he was suddenly recalled, or rather, startled back into recollection by the momentary shaking of the handle of the door, as if somebody had grasped it within and was about to turn it.

Springing to his feet, as if under the influence of galvanism, Page stepped back and then leaned motionless against the wall.

The rustling of his clothes had scarcely ceased when the door opened, and a man came cautiously forth.

Page held his breath; but in the pitchy darkness which prevailed he could neither see nor be seen. No light flashed forth from the door during the instant that it was thus unclosed to allow the individual egress; and it was shut again in a moment. But Page knew, by the tread of the boots upon the oaken floor of the passage, as the person issued from the room, that it was a man; besides, who could it be but that third individual whose voice had completed the whispered dialogue?

Page, we said, held his breath, and the man, whoever he were, paused for a few instants outside the door, apparently to listen if all were still. Then, stealing cautiously along the passage, he proceeded toward the stairs, which he descended with equal carefulness. At length the sounds of his footsteps ceased altogether.

The ex-bagman now crept noiselessly back to his own chamber, where he narrated to Julia all that had occurred. She was as much astonished as he had been at the incident; but the main point being accomplished, namely, the discovery that the prince's fair companion was none other than the high-born and splendid Duchess of Devonshire, Mrs. Page chose rather to speculate upon what benefit the knowledge of this secret might produce, than on the more mysterious event which defied all conjecture.

At an early hour on the following morning a plain carriage, attended by only one footman in addition to the coachman, drove up to the front door of Stamford Manor. The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Devonshire then came forth from their chamber, and were met at the head of the stairs by Mr. and Mrs. Page, the former of whom inquired whether it would please his Royal Highness to partake of breakfast. An answer in the negative was given; but the prince expressed his thanks for the hospitality he had received, and, putting ten guineas into Page's hand, desired him to give them to the dependents of the mansion.

His Royal Highness then handed the Duchess of Devonshire into the carriage, and entering it after her, gave some whispered instructions to the footman, who bowed respectfully, closed the door, and sprang up to his place by the side

of the coachman. The next moment the vehicle was rolling rapidly away from Stamford Manor.

Mr. Page presented the Bryans with a guinea, alleging, in a pompous speech, that the prince had desired that it might be bestowed upon them as a mark of his satisfaction at the treatment he had received; and the unsophisticated old couple, never dreaming that they were being robbed as coolly and impudently as if it were upon the highway, were profoundly delighted and grateful. The astute Mr. Page accordingly pocketed nine guineas by the little transaction.

In the course of the day, he and his wife, having completed their business at Stamford Manor, took their leave of the Bryans and walked across the fields to Aylesbury, whence they procured a conveyance for Windsor.

CHAPTER LII

THE VEILED LADY

THE reader will be pleased to recollect that the grand ball at Carlton House, on the occasion when Pauline Clarendon was presented to the Prince of Wales, took place on a Monday evening. It was on the following morning that Mr. Clarendon received the mysterious visit from the veiled lady, who, on taking leave of him, had expressed herself in these terms: "For the remainder of this week and throughout the next shall I each morning look into the *Times* newspaper. If no communication be made to me through its advertising columns, I shall conclude that you are a mere grumbler who dares not act, a poltroon who can complain, but who lacks the energy necessary to improve his condition and accomplish his desires. On the other hand, if a communication should appear in that journal, addressed to the 'Veiled Lady,' it will instantaneously be attended to."

We must now observe that the remainder of the week in which the visit was paid by this veiled lady to Mr. Clarendon passed away, and no advertisement of the nature specified appeared in the *Times* newspaper. On the following Sunday night was it that the Magsman kept his appointment with the masked nobleman in Hyde Park; on the ensuing Wednesday morning was it that the Prince of Wales had the party of dancing-girls at Carlton House, and received a visit from his royal father; and on the Thursday night it was that the incidents related in the preceding chapter occurred at Stamford Manor. The reader will thus perceive that although the incidents which have occupied the last twenty-seven chapters have been varied and numerous, yet that the time occupied in the action of this portion of our drama has only been ten days; and therefore the time prescribed by the veiled lady

in her farewell speech to Mr. Clarendon had not yet quite expired.

But it was now Friday morning, and Mr. Clarendon had but this one day to decide whether he should seek an interview with the veiled lady or not; for if he determined in the affirmative, it was necessary to send the advertisement for publication in the *Times* of the next morning.

Again, therefore, do we find him in his study, pondering upon the position of his affairs; and, as he pressed his hand to his throbbing brows, it was thus that his musings ran:

“Why do I vacillate thus? Why have I hesitated to summon that mysterious lady to my presence by the means of communication which she pointed out? Octavia refused the proposal of marriage which Arthur Eaton made to her; and she was wrong, foolish, insensate. Such an alliance would have been most advantageous to her, most beneficial to me. It would have given her a position as good as that which Pauline will shortly attain when she becomes Lady Florimel; and it would have ensured the continuation of a handsome independence to myself. But she refused, refused to espouse her cousin, simply because she did not love him. At least, such was the reason she gave; yet I almost begin to imagine that there is some truth in the suspicions which Arthur expressed to me ere he made her the offer of his hand. Yes, it is probable that she loves another. But who can the object of her affections be? I cannot even conjecture. And now, since Wednesday morning she has been staying with the Duchess of Devonshire, whose acquaintance she formed I scarcely know how. There must be something very fascinating in the girl that she should have thus made herself so influential and valuable a friend; and it would be heart-breaking indeed were she to throw herself away upon any penniless or untitled individual, merely in obedience to the sickly sentimentalism which young maidens denominate love. But how am I to act? — for that is the question. This veiled lady who paid me so mysterious a visit last Tuesday week is evidently well acquainted with all my affairs. She emphatically observed that she knew my position to be painful and intolerable to a degree; and she hinted, nay, more than hinted, at the possibility of placing me on that eminence to which my ambition aspires. Can she read, then, the secret

of my heart? Has she penetrated with eagle glance into my soul and beheld the cravings that rack me, the anxious longings which I cherish for those honours that at one time seemed almost within my grasp? Yes, and should I not obey that unaccountable and mysterious presentiment which her visit excited in my brain, — a presentiment teaching me that I had reached some point or crisis in my destiny which would give a colour to all the rest of my existence. Oh, assuredly I must see this veiled lady once more. I can but hear her proposals and listen to the conditions upon which she has offered to aid me. If they be agreeable, I can accept them; if they be repugnant to my feelings, I can reject them.”

Having thus made up his mind how to act, Mr. Clarendon wrote a single line upon a slip of paper, which he forthwith took to the office of the *Times* newspaper.

Reader, have you not frequently observed the strange, mysterious and often deeply affecting advertisements which appear at the top of the second column on the front page of the *Times*? The death-bed has known no anguish and the churchyard no misery greater than the affliction which so often prompts the insertion of a few lines in that place. By those means, the deserted wife implores her husband to return to the home which his absence has left desolate, and to the children whom his flight has made beggars; or else it is the husband who beseeches a guilty wife to go back for her innocent offspring's sake, and all shall be forgiven. And by those means, also, does the criminal who is playing at hide-and-seek with the officers of justice communicate to his friends that intelligence which he dares not entrust to the post-office; or the bailiff-hunted debtor adopts this medium to acknowledge the receipt of some pecuniary assistance which an indulgent relative had forwarded to an address specified, that address being not, however, the recipient's home. That small space in the *Times* newspaper, that nook of a couple of square inches, often contains a whole world of wild and harrowed feelings. It is the modern Temple of Delphi to which the heart flies to seek for those oracles of hope which are lost elsewhere; but, alas! how often does it prove the morgue where appalling suspense becomes changed into the conviction of overwhelming sorrow.

And it was in this place in the *Times* newspaper that the

following brief advertisement appeared upon the Saturday morning:

"To the Veiled Lady: Another and immediate interview is requested by C."

Mr. Clarendon rose at an earlier hour than usual on this morning, which he felt was destined to be a memorable one in the history of his life. An unnatural excitement imparted a hectic flush to his usually sallow cheeks; and a wild gleaming light shone in his restless eyes.

At any other time Pauline would have noticed her father's altered appearance, and would have affectionately inquired the cause; but on the present occasion she also was absorbed in her own reflections, which were not of a pleasurable nature. And, like her father too, did she endeavour to conceal the preoccupation of her mind. Thus were parent and daughter to a certain extent practising duplicity toward each other. Few observations were exchanged at the breakfast-table; and the moment he had partaken of a cup of chocolate, — for the more substantial food remained untasted by him, — Mr. Clarendon repaired to his study.

At eleven o'clock on that forenoon a loud double knock and a ring at the front door resounded through the house. Pauline hastened to the window of the front parlour and peeped from behind the curtain in a manner denoting the most acute anxiety and suspense; but when she observed that there was no carriage at the door and that the arrival was a lady on foot, she heaved a profound sigh, turned away from the casement, and, reseating herself on the sofa, fell into a train of gloomy reflections.

But upon Mr. Clarendon that knock and ring produced the startling influence of galvanism; and bounding from his chair, he stood in trembling expectation of beholding the mysterious being whom he had adjured to appear.

Nor was he disappointed; for in a few moments the veiled lady stood before him.

Penetrating and piercing was the glance which he threw upon her, in order, if possible, to obtain a glimpse of her features; but, no, the thick black veil was still so folded as to render it impossible for him to gratify his curiosity. Nevertheless, as his looks swept her form, he beheld all that sym-

metrical grace of outline and all that beauty of proportion which had struck him on the former occasion of her visit; and a straggling curl, escaping from beneath the veil and lying on the sloping shoulder, showed that her hair was of a rich dark, glossy brown.

Mr. Clarendon placed a chair for her accommodation, and then resuming his own seat, observed, "You saw my advertisement in this morning's *Times*."

"Otherwise I should not be here," promptly answered the lady, in that musical voice which nature never meant to waft any other language than that of love and peace and gaiety. "You have pondered well upon the discourse which took place between us last Tuesday week?"

"I have," returned Mr. Clarendon. "Pray come to the point at once, be explicit, and relieve me from suspense. What do you know of my affairs, what can you do for me, and who are you?"

"I know everything concerning you, Mr. Clarendon," rejoined the lady; "not only your position, but likewise your secret thoughts. When I was with you on the former occasion, I read your soul thoroughly and comprehended your character well. You are ambitious, and your longings may be gratified, if you have the courage to enter upon the course which I shall point out."

"And that course?" said Mr. Clarendon, trembling with agitation.

"Is not free from crime," answered the lady, in a resolute tone; and, as she leaned slightly forward, it seemed to Mr. Clarendon that her eyes shone with a sinister lustre even through the thick folds of the black veil.

"Crime! crime!" murmured the ambitious man. "Is the world, then, so constituted that nothing can be done without crime? But there are degrees in crime, lady," he said, aloud, and addressing himself directly to her.

"He who aspires to great things must not hesitate to commit great crimes," was the startling response; and the voice which gave utterance to these ferocious words was suitably stern and merciless in its tone.

"Great crimes!" repeated Mr. Clarendon. "Yes, to wrong the orphan or rob the widow, to plunder the confiding and the unprotected, — these are great crimes; but —"

"But they are nothing in comparison with the deeds which

men must often perpetrate to gain a special end," exclaimed the lady. "Forgery is a greater crime than any you have named; and murder," she added, sinking her voice to a low whisper, so that her words came hissing through the veil as if it were a serpent's head that were concealed behind it, "murder is the greatest crime of all."

"Murder!" repeated Mr. Clarendon, his whole frame convulsing with a shudder that was perfectly visible. "Who art thou, temptress? Why dost thou come hither to try me? What dost thou mean?"

"Listen," said the lady, with imperturbable calmness and self-possession. "Suppose that you were walking in company with the Honourable Arthur Eaton along the brink of a tremendous precipice overlooking the sea; and suppose that no eye saw you save that of God, and you were well convinced that human suspicion would never attach itself to you, but that you might continue to hold your head erect —"

"Enough! enough!" exclaimed Mr. Clarendon. "I understand you but too well. Great Heaven! what feeling is this that prompts me to fall into your views, that impels me to rush blindly into the course which you are already developing with a dim yet horrible significance —"

"Oh, give not way to a maudlin sentimentalism," cried the lady, in a tone of contempt; "but proclaim yourself at once a man who is able to resolve sternly and act courageously. I say, then, would you, in the case which I propounded, thrust forth your hand and hurl from the precipice the only human being who stands between yourself and a proud title with a princely fortune?"

"Who are you that ask this question?" demanded Clarendon, rising from his seat. "What guarantee have I that no treachery is intended by your visit, that no snare is laid for me by your language?"

"The guarantee that there are no witnesses to our discourse, and that you could indignantly deny any averments I might choose to make publicly respecting the particulars of this interview. This is your guarantee," added the lady, emphatically.

"True," ejaculated Mr. Clarendon. "Well, I will yield to the current which is already beginning to bear me along. I will throw myself entirely upon your honour and mercy

and I will confess all that you desire me to admit. Now do you understand me, and are you satisfied? "

"I understand that you will not hesitate at any crime which may be necessary to accomplish certain aims," said the lady. "Promise me this, and I shall be satisfied."

"I promise," answered Mr. Clarendon, in a tone rendered firm by the desperation of a soul suddenly nerved to accomplish any turpitude; "nay, more, I swear! "

"Good!" exclaimed the lady, in a voice expressive of that deep concentrated satisfaction which a tigress might be supposed to feel after feasting her ravenous maw on human flesh. "And now listen to the terms on which I offer to serve you. But start not, the condition is a singular one, and it is — "

"Name it, name it!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, his suspense being once more raised to a feverish pitch. "What is this condition? "

"That you marry me," was the reply.

"Woman, you are mad, or you are making a cruel mockery of my feelings," cried Mr. Clarendon, springing from his seat.

"I never was more serious in my life," observed the lady, in that calm, imperturbable tone which bespoke alike the remorseless nature of her disposition and the strength of her character. "Resume your seat, and listen attentively."

Mr. Clarendon sat down accordingly.

"The Honourable Arthur Eaton," continued the lady, "stands between you and the Marchmont peerage. Consequently his removal from the theatre of this world is necessary to your interests. On the other hand, his death can alone appease the now insatiate vengeance which I entertain toward him. But you cannot make him your victim without practising violence or stratagem, and in either case suspicion may fall upon you; and I am powerless, so long as I remain unaided and alone. But together, we may accomplish our purpose; and the same result which ministers to your ambition gratifies my revenge. Now, Mr. Clarendon, do you comprehend me? "

"I do," was the gloomy answer. "But what happiness, think you, will result from an alliance such as this which you propose that we should form? "

"Happiness!" ejaculated the lady, in a tone of ineffable contempt; "what care we for domestic happiness? Our

aims are of a higher nature and have a grander scope. You have your ambition to gratify, I my vengeance; you will attain the object of your desires, I shall reach mine. These ends once accomplished, what matters it whether we suit each other as husband and wife? On the contrary, let us each pursue our own course according to our respective fancy and taste. Have you your mistresses, should it so please you; but blame me not if I likewise have my lovers. But should it chance that we experience an affection for each other, should your courage in executing our purpose win my heart, and should my beauty captivate you, well, so much the better. For I am beautiful, exceedingly beautiful, at least the world says so; and on that score you will not be ashamed of your wife."

"But this implacable vengeance which you cherish against Arthur Eaton," said Mr. Clarendon, "whence did it arise? How has he provoked your hatred?"

"Would you know the truth?" she exclaimed, with a laugh which sounded wild and savage from behind that thick black veil. "Oh, it is a strange secret for a woman to reveal to the man whom she invites to marry her! Nevertheless, I am not disposed to stand upon any false delicacy in these negotiations which are now progressing between us. In a word, then, Mr. Clarendon," she added, her voice becoming suddenly hoarse and thick, "Arthur Eaton seduced me, and I have sworn to wreak a deadly vengeance upon him."

"Methought that he loved, at least at one time, a certain Miss Fernanda Aylmer?" said Clarendon. "Surely, surely, you cannot be the niece of the Earl of Desborough?"

"There is no need for further disguise nor mystery," exclaimed the lady. "Yes, I am Fernanda Aylmer."

And she threw back the dark veil, thus revealing to the eyes of Mr. Clarendon that beauteous countenance which seemed as unfit to express the working of all the darkest passions of the human soul as the blushing rose to bear the slime of the snail upon its bloom.

The snowy skin and the scarlet lip, the luxuriant brown hair and the deep violet eyes, the proudly rising throat and the well-developed but not exuberant bust, the exquisitely chiseled nose and the pearly teeth, the high forehead softly veined, and the classically rounded chin, — these were the

charms which constituted the whole glory of dazzling beauty that burst upon the sight of Mr. Clarendon.

He had heard of Miss Aylmer on many occasions, but he had never seen her face until now. And when it was thus revealed to him, his first feeling was one of joy and pleasure at the idea of possessing such a bride; his second was an emotion of mingled horror and dread at the thought of taking to his bosom a snake with so lovely a skin. But again, and all in a moment, did his sentiments undergo a transition, and heeding only the glittering prize of a coronet which by her agency appeared to be within his reach, the infatuated votary of ambition smiled with ineffable satisfaction as he took her hand, saying, "Fernanda, you are adorable, and I already love you!"

"Then, as we have come to so perfect an understanding on all points," exclaimed Miss Aylmer, "let there be no delay in affording each other the proper guarantees of our mutual sincerity. The distance is not great from hence to Doctors' Commons; a license can be procured there in a few minutes, and at the private residence of some clergyman in the neighbourhood may our hands be joined in matrimonial bonds. Come, Mr. Clarendon, do you hesitate?"

"Not at all," was the reply. "But I was thinking that the abruptness of this step would surprise the world — my daughters too —"

"We care nothing for the world," interrupted Fernanda, petulantly; "and as for your daughters, dare they look coldly upon their father, or superciliously upon the mother-in-law whom he may introduce to them?"

"Assuredly not," answered Mr. Clarendon. "But there is still another objection which I am compelled to urge against the precipitation of this step."

"Speak, speak!" ejaculated Fernanda, impatiently.

"You are probably aware that my income depends wholly and solely upon the generosity of Lord Marchmont," continued Mr. Clarendon; "and should he take offence at this marriage, or should his son Arthur conceive that such an alliance is at least fraught with suspicion, if not actual menace toward himself —"

"In that case you will lose your income — is it not so?" exclaimed Fernanda. Then, without waiting for a reply, she observed: "But you may make yourself perfectly

easy upon that head. I am not without friends or resources."

"Yes, I am well aware that your uncle, the Earl of Desborough, is rich," said Mr. Clarendon; "but I was fearful that, should he likewise disapprove of this match, your own means would be dried up as well as my own."

"I care not the value of a grain of sand for either Lord or Lady Desborough," returned Miss Aylmer; "and, thank Heaven! I am not dependent upon their bounty. In Lord Montgomery I possess a generous relative and kind friend, and for many months past he has supplied my purse without even inquiring the purposes for which I have needed considerable sums of gold. Look!" she exclaimed, drawing forth several bank-notes from the bosom of her dress and displaying them before the eyes of Mr. Clarendon; "here are two thousand pounds, and this amount will last us a considerable time. When it is gone, my cousin Lord Montgomery will not fail to act as my banker."

"But how know you that even he may approve of this marriage?" demanded Mr. Clarendon.

"I know that he will not disapprove of anything that I may do in order to forward my own interests or aims," answered Miss Aylmer, in a decided tone. "Are all your objections now set at rest, or have you any further scruples to get rid of?"

"None," responded Mr. Clarendon, yielding to the force of circumstances, or rather to the temptations thrown in his way, with the desperate firmness of a man who surrenders up his soul to Satan.

Miss Aylmer replaced the veil over her countenance and quitted the house, Mr. Clarendon undertaking to meet her in a few minutes in Portland Place. His toilet was then hurriedly performed; and, without breathing a word of his intentions to his daughter Pauline, he hastened to join his intended bride at the spot where she was waiting for him. A hackney-coach was immediately summoned; and the driver received orders to repair direct to Doctors' Commons.

PART III

CHAPTER I

PAULINE

WE have already stated that Pauline was too much absorbed in her own mournful reflections to notice the excited manner of her father on this memorable morning. We have also observed that when Fernanda Aylmer knocked at the door, the young maiden hurried to the window and was disappointed when she found that the arrival was not the one which she was evidently awaiting in deep suspense.

Resuming her seat upon the sofa, the beautiful Pauline gave way to her sorrowful meditations; but from time to time she looked at her watch, — that very watch which Lady Desborough had presented to her at the villa in the Edgeware Road.

At length she observed that it was midday, and the excitement of suspense and impatience was becoming intolerable.

Drawing forth a note from her bosom, she read it with attention; and the tears fell from her eyes, moistening the page with their pearly shower.

The contents of this letter were as follows:

“CARLTON HOUSE, Wednesday afternoon.

“MY DEAR MISS PAULINE: — I regret — deeply regret — to be compelled to address you upon a most unpleasant subject; but I implore you to tranquillize yourself

and listen to the good counsel which Lord Florimel will give you. Poor Octavia called upon me just now. That she was about to take this step, you were doubtless aware. Need I assure you that I received her with kindness, and that I said all I could to console her? But her excitement grew alarming, and she became very ill. Fortunately the Duchess of Devonshire arrived at the moment; and her Grace (with whom I am charmed to find that you are acquainted) volunteered to take charge of the dear girl. To this proposal I readily assented, fearful that if Octavia were conveyed home immediately, your father would inevitably discover all. The Duchess of Devonshire has therefore taken your dear sister to a secluded villa which her Grace possesses at a little distance from London; and there can be no doubt that in two or three days Octavia will be completely restored to health. The moment her Grace had departed with your sister, I sent for Lord Florimel, to whom I candidly narrated what had occurred, deeming him to be the most proper person to break the intelligence to you, and advise with you how to account to your father for Octavia's temporary absence from home. His lordship kindly and promptly undertook this task; but he requested me to pen a few lines to you, of which he offered to become the bearer. Hence this brief note.

"I should add that her Grace of Devonshire has promised to visit you on Saturday next, in the forenoon, so that she may either report to you the progress which your dear sister may be making toward complete convalescence, or else have the pleasure of restoring Octavia altogether to your arms.

"That this latter alternative may be the one which next Saturday morning will see accomplished, is a wish that comes from the heart of

"Your affectionate friend,

"GEORGE P."

Such was the letter from the Prince of Wales which Pauline Clarendon now read. As the reader may observe by the heading, it was written on the preceding Wednesday afternoon, a couple of hours after the terrible scene which occurred at Carlton House in respect to Octavia.

And why did the young lady now refer to it again? Simply to assure herself that the visit of the Duchess of Devonshire

was indeed promised for the forenoon of this Saturday on which we find her so anxiously awaiting the arrival of her Grace.

Scarcely had she read the contents of that page which in a few moments became moistened with her tears, when a carriage stopped at the door. Thrusting the letter in her bosom, Pauline hurried to the window; and a faint smile of satisfaction appeared upon her lips, as she beheld her devoted lover, Lord Florimel, descend. Another minute, and she was clasped in his arms.

"What news of Octavia, my dearest Pauline?" he demanded, leading her to a seat and placing himself by her side. Then, perceiving that her countenance bore traces of recent weeping, he exclaimed, ere she had time to reply, "Alas! nothing satisfactory, I am afraid. But tell me, Pauline, has any additional intelligence reached you?"

"None, dear Gabriel," was the answer. "You are aware that the Duchess of Devonshire was to call this morning; but it is now past midday, and she has not yet made her appearance."

"Her Grace will be sure to come, beloved girl," said Florimel, speaking in his most soothing tone and lavishing the tenderest caresses upon the charming creature on whom his affections were so devoutly fixed. "Let us hope for the best."

"Oh, I am almost wearied of indulging in hope concerning this fatal amour of my unhappy sister with the prince," exclaimed Pauline, reposing her beauteous head upon her lover's shoulder and pressing his hand in both her own. "I tremble for the consequences, Gabriel. What can I do, if her Grace should not come? Or how am I to act in the still more embarrassing position in which I shall be placed if Octavia do not return home well in health and comparatively tranquillized in mind? Must I not fly to her and offer the consolations of a sister? And yet how can I leave my father unattended by either of his daughters? Moreover, such a step on my part would probably engender suspicions in his mind —"

"But he is aware that Octavia is staying with the duchess, is he not?" inquired Florimel.

"Yes," was the answer. "He does not, however, suspect that she is ill, much less that she has anything so very

dreadful preying upon her mind. And I feel, Gabriel, as if I were playing a treacherous and false part toward my father," continued Pauline, in a tone of deep feeling and earnest sincerity. "It seems to me that I am culpable of great duplicity and falsehood in concealing from him the real truth. Nevertheless, that truth I dare not avow; for if my father's suspicions were once excited, he would pursue his inquiries and investigation until he had fathomed the whole affair in all its lamentable details. And there is another source of uneasiness which I experience," observed Pauline, after a few moments' pause; "which is, that the real extent of Octavia's illness was not made known to me. From the moment that you delivered the prince's letter into my hands last Wednesday afternoon, I have been tortured with misgivings to the effect that Octavia is worse than his Royal Highness represented. What did he tell you, Gabriel? Do you really believe that his note contained the entire truth and that nothing still more unfavourable was concealed?"

"The prince gave me precisely the same account which was contained in his letter, dear Pauline," answered Lord Florimel. "I repeated to you word for word all he said to me; but if you wish, I will tell it to you over again."

At this moment a loud double knock resounded through the house, and Pauline rushed to the window. A carriage, with a ducal coronet upon the panels, was standing at the door, and the Duchess of Devonshire immediately alighted. But she was alone, Octavia was not with her, and Pauline's heart sank with a sickening sensation in her bosom.

The duchess was conducted to the drawing-room, and thither did Pauline repair, leaning upon Florimel's arm, for a faintness was in all her limbs, and her spirit was crushed with a presentiment of evil.

"I am glad that you are here, Gabriel," were the first words which the duchess uttered, as she caught sight of the young nobleman. Then, taking Pauline's hand, she said, "My dear young friend, I shall not keep you in a state of unnecessary suspense —"

"No, no; for Heaven's sake, speak!" murmured the maiden, shuddering from head to foot. "I see that your Grace has bad news for me —"

"Alas! would that I could give you some reassuring

answer!" exclaimed the duchess, "but poor Octavia is far from well; the blow has been a cruel one."

"But she is alive?" ejaculated Pauline, in a tone of thrilling anguish, as the terrible idea flashed to her imagination that her beloved sister was no more, and that the duchess was about to break the tidings of her death as gently as possible.

"Oh, entertain not such a dreadful apprehension!" cried Georgiana, penetrating her thoughts. "Yes, Octavia is alive, thank Heaven, and well too in bodily health."

"Oh, horror! I begin to comprehend the appalling truth!" shrieked forth the wretched Pauline. "It is her reason that is affected, her senses have abandoned her! Great Heaven, I understand it all now — and your Grace does not contradict the fact. Alas! alas! my poor dear ruined sister, what has thy destroyer done to thee? What new iniquity has he perpetrated? Oh, vengeance upon his head — no, not vengeance; 'tis mercy that I implore of the prince, mercy on behalf of the ruined Octavia."

And having given utterance to these exclamations in a wild tone, and with a countenance evincing the poignancy of the anguish which rent her soul, Pauline sank upon her knees, covered her face with her hands, and burst into an uncontrollable passion of sobs and tears and bitter lamentations.

"Let her weep, Gabriel, let her weep," whispered the duchess, hastily, to the young nobleman, as he rushed forward to raise his well-beloved from that posture of despair. "This outpouring of her surcharged soul will relieve her."

And for some minutes Pauline continued to give way to her almost frantic sorrow.

But suddenly raising her head, though without moving from her knees, she looked up into Georgiana's countenance, exclaiming, "You have not told me whether my horrible suspicion be true. Perhaps I may be wrong — God grant that I am. Is my sister so deeply afflicted that she has lost her reason? Tell me, dear lady, oh, tell me. Let me know the worst, or else give me instantaneous relief by the assurance that my fears have exaggerated the evil."

And as she thus spoke, the beauteous creature twined her outstretched arms around the form of the splendid Duchess of Devonshire, every lineament of the anguished

countenance expressing the intense anxiety with which the response was awaited.

"My dear girl," said her Grace, profoundly affected, "your surmise is indeed too true. But, in the name of God, tranquillize yourself —"

"No, I cannot become tranquil," exclaimed Pauline, springing straight up like a galvanized body. "Something must now be done, a decisive course must be taken; I can deceive my father no longer. He is not at home now, but he will return presently, and then, oh, then," she added, wildly, "I shall throw myself upon my knees before him, I shall tell him all, and I shall implore his forgiveness on behalf of my poor ruined sister."

She paused, seated herself on the sofa, and appeared to reflect profoundly for upwards of a minute.

At length Lord Florimel approached her, and, taking her hand, he pressed it to his lips, saying, "My beloved Pauline, I beseech, I implore you to compose yourself. All may not be so bad as you imagine —"

"It is impossible that the aspect of my poor sister's position can be worse, Gabriel," interrupted the young maiden, in a tone of profound feeling; and then followed another outburst of indescribable anguish.

"Listen to me, my sweet young friend," said the Duchess of Devonshire, when the violence of this new paroxysm of Pauline's affliction had somewhat subsided; and placing herself by the young lady's side on the sofa, Georgiana took her hand with every demonstration of affection, observing, "You are endowed, Pauline, with a strong mind and excellent sense, and I am certain that you will look this misfortune courageously in the face. For that any harm which happens to your sister becomes a misfortune to yourself, I am well aware, so great is the affection existing between you both. But what course does prudence now recommend? That the veil of secrecy shall be drawn as completely as possible around this lamentable occurrence, and that the world shall not be suffered to learn the real cause of Octavia's affliction. She is now in a comfortable retirement, surrounded by all the gentle ministrations and affectionate attentions which friendship can suggest and which her position demands. An eminent medical practitioner devotes himself to her cure; and he last evening declared to me most

solemnly that in a few weeks' time her reason will be re-established, provided his regimen receive no hindrance nor interruption. It would, therefore, be imprudent, my dear Pauline, to think of visiting your sister at present. As for cherishing sentiments of vindictiveness against the Prince of Wales, your own good sense will show you how useless and ineffectual such a project must prove, while its only result would be to proclaim to the world your beloved sister's dishonour. Respecting your father, my dear Pauline," continued the duchess, her tone becoming more tender and soothing as she proceeded, "I will myself undertake to communicate the distressing intelligence to him; and I will guarantee that he shall pardon his afflicted daughter, pardon you also for having in any respect withholden from him the truth."

"Her Grace speaks fairly and kindly, Pauline," said Lord Florimel; "and you will do well to leave the matter entirely in her hands."

"Yes, I will follow your advice, dear Gabriel," returned the young maiden; "and to your ladyship," she added, addressing herself to Georgiana, "my eternal gratitude is due for all the generous interest you have taken and are still taking in this lamentable affair. But tell me about my dear sister: is she melancholy or excited, and where is she?"

"Octavia is at a charming little villa which I possess in Buckinghamshire, at no considerable distance from Aylesbury," replied the duchess. "Respecting the state of her mind, I must inform you that there are times when she is dreadfully excited, and others at which she falls into a black despair."

"Poor Octavia!" murmured Pauline, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and her lovely bosom heaving with the sobs which half-choked her.

"But as I have before stated," continued Georgiana, "she is under the charge not only of kind attendants, but likewise of a skilful physician; and you may be assured, my sweet young friend, that the moment Doctor Clarges gives his permission for you to visit her, I will myself come and fetch you in my carriage for that purpose."

In this manner did the Duchess of Devonshire and Lord Florimel exert themselves to soothe the afflicted mind of the younger Miss Clarendon; and in the course of an hour

she became considerably tranquillized. They were then all enabled to converse more calmly and seriously upon the unhappy event which had occasioned Pauline so much sorrow; and the Duchess of Devonshire took an opportunity to hint that she was the bearer of such good tidings for Mr. Clarendon in one sense that he would be partially consoled for the evil intelligence awaiting him in another.

Thus did three hours pass away; and the timepiece on the mantel was striking four, when a hackney-coach drove up to the front door, and Mr. Clarendon alighted.

But instead of immediately entering the house, he turned to hand a lady from the vehicle; and this fair companion, taking his arm, passed into the dwelling with him.

Another minute, and the drawing-room door being thrown open, Mr. Clarendon and Fernanda appeared upon the threshold; and the former, leading his companion toward Pauline, said, "My dear child, this lady has consented to ensure my happiness by becoming my wife. It is for you to welcome her to that home over which she will henceforth preside with the dignity, grace, and kindness natural to her character."

CHAPTER II

MR. CLARENDON

It would be impossible to describe the astonishment, amounting to a positive shock, which Pauline experienced as this strange announcement fell upon her ears. The colour forsook her cheeks, and she stood motionless and pale as a statue, her eyes fixed vacantly upon Fernanda. Then a crimson glow suddenly suffused her countenance, her bosom rose and fell rapidly, and her looks settled upon her father's features, as if to read the truth therein and convince herself that she was not being made the victim of a heartless joke or cruel mockery.

To Fernanda this scene, brief though it were, was far from agreeable, especially as she immediately recognized the Duchess of Devonshire and Lord Florimel, with both of whom she was acquainted; but, with characteristic self-possession and firmness, she took Pauline's hand, saying, "Have you no congratulations to offer to your father, if not to me? But we shall be friends, very good friends, dear girl, when you come to know me well."

These words recalled the maiden to a sense of the necessity of demonstrating her obedience toward her parent's wishes, as well as her respect for the choice which he had made and the step which he had taken. She accordingly endeavoured to make a suitable reply to Fernanda's speech and give utterance to some words of welcome and congratulation; but the thought suddenly flashed to her mind that while her father was bringing home a young and beauteous bride, her sister was suffering under the most cruel affliction. A torrent of tears choked her utterance, and, staggering back a few paces, she would have fallen heavily, had not Lord Florimel caught her in his arms and supported her to the sofa.

Mr. Clarendon's countenance became black with displeasure, and Fernanda turned white and red a dozen times in half a minute.

But the Duchess of Devonshire hastened to approach them, and, taking the hand of the latter, said, "My dear friend, I congratulate you, most sincerely congratulate you, upon the alliance which you have formed, as I have not the slightest doubt that you have therein consulted your own happiness. Being an old friend of your aunt, Lady Desborough, I am naturally interested in your welfare; and I therefore rejoice that accident should have led to my being here so opportunely to offer my felicitations. You will present me to Mr. Clarendon, Fernanda," added her Grace, with a sweet smile.

The introduction took place; and the duchess hastened to say, as she glanced toward Pauline, "Mr. Clarendon, you must not misinterpret your daughter's feelings. She is too good, dutiful, and affectionate a girl not to be contented and satisfied with any step which you may take to ensure your own happiness; and therefore the embarrassment which she evinced at first and the emotions which she is experiencing now must not be attributed to a wrong cause. The truth is, Mr. Clarendon," added Georgiana, "she has this afternoon received intelligence that is only too well calculated to afflict her; and circumstances rendered me the unwilling bearer of these evil tidings."

"Evil tidings!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, throwing a glance of anxious inquiry upon the countenance of the Duchess of Devonshire.

"Alas! it is too true," replied her Grace; "and these tidings equally regard you. But I have likewise some welcome intelligence to impart; and therefore I must crave a few minutes' interview with you alone."

Mr. Clarendon glanced toward his bride to see what effect these mysterious words on the part of the duchess produced upon her; and it instantaneously struck the shrewd and far-seeing Georgiana that the favourable portion of what she had to communicate would materially please, as indeed it now materially interested Fernanda in her capacity as Mr. Clarendon's wife.

With admirable tact and judgment, therefore, did the Duchess of Devonshire hasten to observe, "When I say that

I request an interview with you alone, Mr. Clarendon, I do not mean to exclude your fair bride from our conference."

Fernanda's countenance now brightened up; and Mr. Clarendon led the way to an adjacent apartment, Lord Florimel being thus left to console his well-beloved Pauline in the drawing-room.

"I have already hinted," said the Duchess of Devonshire, when she was alone with Mr. and Mrs. Clarendon, "that the nature of the communications which I have to make is two-fold. On one side there is a great calamity, on the other an amazing piece of good fortune. I will not, however, insult you, Mr. Clarendon, by intimating that the latter will entirely compensate for the former; but as you are a man of the world and doubtless entertain that laudable ambition which animates the breasts of all human creatures, you will doubtless perceive in the favourable tidings a certain atonement as well as solace for the evil intelligence."

"I beseech your Grace to explain yourself at once," said Mr. Clarendon, trembling all over with nervous anxiety and suspense.

"In the first place," continued the duchess, "you must prepare to hear unpleasant news respecting your elder daughter, Octavia."

"Ah! what of her?" ejaculated Clarendon, the feelings of a father suddenly vibrating painfully to the ominous sound of words which appeared to herald the revelation of a misfortune.

"Your daughter, your elder daughter, the lovely and fascinating Octavia," said the duchess, solemnly, "has been seduced."

"Impossible!" cried the wretched man, bounding upon his chair as if a bullet had penetrated his heart. "She is virtue itself."

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Georgiana, "her virtue has yielded to the influence of love and temptation."

"Maledictions upon the man who has blighted that fair flower!" thundered forth the enraged father, springing from his seat and gesticulating with awful vehemence.

"Stay! stay!" cried Georgiana, catching him by the arm. "He who has thus deeply injured you in one sense has vouchsafed a royal act of bounty in another."

"A royal act!" repeated Clarendon, catching at the

word which seemed to afford an instantaneous clue to the solution of the mystery that was connected with his daughter's shame. "What am I to understand from your Grace's observation? Has royalty so far honoured me as to debauch my daughter?" he demanded, with a laugh of almost maniac bitterness.

"Cease this useless excitement," said Fernanda, "and let us hear what atonement is offered. For that reparation of some kind is intended for the injury thus done you in the person of your daughter, is evident from the language of her Grace."

"Atonement — reparation!" murmured Mr. Clarendon, sinking down into his seat again. "Well, let us hear it! May it please your Grace to continue," he observed, half-ironically, as he threw a wild glance upon the Duchess of Devonshire.

"I pray you to look upon me as a messenger of peace and conciliation," said Georgiana, stifling the resentment which rose up in her bosom at Mr. Clarendon's ungracious manner. "Your daughter Octavia had the misfortune to attract the notice of the Prince of Wales, and in a moment of love and passion he triumphed over her virtue. But unfortunately the calamity does not end there. On Wednesday last Octavia sought an interview with her royal lover, and the excitement of the scene which ensued has temporarily impaired her reason."

"Holy God! what do I hear?" exclaimed the unhappy father, once more springing from his seat.

"My lord, I implore your lordship to be calm and composed," said the Duchess of Devonshire, in a tone of suitable significance.

"Ah! what do I hear?" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, turning toward her Grace with an abrupt start. "Was it to me that those sounding titles were addressed?"

"To whom else could I have spoken?" asked Georgiana, with a sweet smile. "I have revealed to you the injury, and I now proclaim the atonement. The prince has inflicted the wound, and to the extent of his power he administers the anodyne. Permit me, then, to congratulate your lordship upon your elevation to the peerage; and here is the patent of nobility which confers upon you the title of Baron Holderness."

The newly created peer received the parchment from the hands of the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire; but he took it mechanically, staring upon her vacantly at the same time. It was evident that he could not believe his own ears, nor dared to trust his own eyes; he fancied that he was dreaming, and feared to utter even a word or make an abrupt movement lest he should awake and thereby dissipate the golden vision.

But Fernanda snatched away the parchment, tore it open, and was in a moment convinced that the Duchess of Devonshire had indeed spoken truly. The patent of nobility was drawn up in due form, and conferred upon Walter Octavius Clarendon, Esquire, the style and title of Baron Lord Holderness to be had and held by himself and male heirs so long as his posterity should exist. A document on foolscap paper was annexed to the patent; and the hasty glance which Fernanda threw over the former showed that the peerage was accompanied by the grant of a pension of two thousand pounds a year, "for services rendered at divers times and in sundry manners to the sovereigns of these realms by the ancestors of the said Walter Octavius Clarendon, Baron Holderness, and likewise to enable him to maintain the dignity of his peerage."

A glow of mingled pride and joy suffused the countenance of Fernanda; and her husband, observing the animated expression of her features, no longer remained skeptical with regard to his good fortune. Taking the papers from her hand, he perused them with attention; and by degrees, as he read, the colour came to his sallow cheeks, the light of ineffable satisfaction and triumph gleamed in his eyes, his nostrils dilated, his chest expanded, and a thrill of ecstasy passed over his frame as he felt that the object of all his ambition was suddenly and most unexpectedly attained.

Forgotten was Octavia, unheeded now were her wrongs; and, elate with boundless satisfaction, the newly made peer expressed his gratitude to the Duchess of Devonshire for having been the bearer of the welcome tidings which now alone engrossed his attention. Turning toward Fernanda, he saluted her by the name of Lady Holderness, and embraced her as fervently as if they had been courting for years and had married through love. Then, flinging open

the door and holding the papers in his hand, he hurried to the drawing-room to announce his good fortune to his younger daughter, and inform her that she was now the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon.

The young lady was seated upon the sofa in earnest conversation with Lord Florimel, when her father burst into the room.

"My dear child," he exclaimed, running up to her and catching her in his arms, "congratulate me! I am now one of England's peers, no longer the obscure and humble Mr. Clarendon, dependent on the bounty of a haughty relative, but Lord Holderness, with two thousand a year. Congratulate me, I say, dear Pauline."

But the young maiden withdrew herself abruptly, and even violently, from her father's arms; and, surveying him for a few moments with a troubled countenance and a swelling bosom, she said, "Is it possible you can rejoice to-day after all that the Duchess of Devonshire must have revealed to you?"

Then back to the memory of Lord Holderness flashed the remembrance of his ruined and demented daughter; and, while a sudden pallor swept over his countenance, he staggered back a pace or two as if he were about to fall. But almost instantly recovering himself, he exclaimed, "Oh, our dear Octavia's secret shall be hushed up, and with kind treatment she will soon regain her mental equilibrium. We must not be hard upon the prince; he is not to be judged by the same rules to which ordinary men are subject, and besides has he not done all that lies in his power to make reparation and atonement?"

"Oh, my dear father," cried Pauline, in a rending tone of anguish, "can you find consolation in such wretched sophistry as this? Here on my knees, before you," she exclaimed, sinking down at his feet and joining her hands beseechingly, "do I call upon you to reject with scorn the bauble that has been offered as a recompense for the ruined honour of your elder daughter. Oh, I can understand it all, this peerage and this pension —"

"Silence, child!" ejaculated Lord Holderness. "It is for me to judge what I ought to accept or refuse, and not for you to dictate. Rise, I command you, and let me have no more of this puling sentimentalism."

For a few moments Pauline remained like a kneeling statue, transfixed and paralyzed with the shock occasioned by her father's language. Her upraised countenance, pale as marble, denoted amazement blended with terror and grief; and her arms remained outstretched to their full length, the hands being joined.

But suddenly her cheeks flushed and her eyes flashed fire in a manner never seen before with respect to her; and, rising hastily from her suppliant posture, she said, in a low, thick voice, "Father, am I to understand that you accept this peerage and this pension as the recompense for our Octavia's dishonour?"

"Silence, child, I command you to be silent!" exclaimed Lord Holderness, his countenance growing livid with rage.

"Then this house is no longer a home for me," said Pauline, her features once more becoming ghastly pale, her whole form quivering with the strong spasms that shot through her heart, but her voice, nevertheless, indicating the firmness of a heroine and the self-devotion of a martyr. "Farewell, father, farewell! Not for worlds would I bask in the sunshine of that coronet which has been thus ignobly purchased; not to save myself from starvation would I eat a morsel of bread bought with the pension given as a reward for my poor dear sister's ruin. Farewell, father; I will pray for you morning and night, as heretofore, but your house can no longer be my home."

She paused for a few moments, and cast a rapid look around. In the features of Florimel she read the rapture of that admiration and worship which her noble conduct excited in his soul; in the countenance of the duchess she observed an expression of approval which her Grace could not subdue. But she saw that her father was dogged and morose; while his newly wedded wife, Lady Holderness, stood by his side darting fierce and implacable glances upon the heroic maiden.

Then Pauline, advancing toward the Duchess of Devonshire, said, in a tone of mingled confidence and entreaty, "Your Grace will afford me an asylum for a few hours until I can repair to the abode of my sister?"

"Ponder, reflect, Pauline," exclaimed Georgiana; "think of the step you are taking."

"Then you refuse me an asylum?" said the young maiden,

turning away; and as her eyes filled with tears, she was about to address herself to Lord Florimel, when the duchess, who was naturally of unbounded generosity, caught her in her arms and embraced her tenderly.

"Yes, come with me, dear Pauline," exclaimed Georgiana; "and not only for a few hours, but for days and weeks and years may you command a home beneath my roof."

"A thousand thanks!" murmured Pauline, bursting into tears. "One moment, and I shall be with you."

And she hurried away to her own chamber, to put on her bonnet and scarf.

But as she was about to quit the drawing-room, Lord Holderness stretched out his hand to retain her, for his heart suddenly gave way at the thought of losing his youngest born thus.

"Let the wilful girl have her own way," said Fernanda, sharply, as she caught hold of her husband's arm and drew it back.

And Lord Holderness made not another effort to induce Pauline to alter her determination.

Two minutes elapsed, during which not a word was spoken in the drawing-room.

At the expiration of that time a servant entered, and addressing himself to the duchess, said, "Miss Clarendon is already seated in your Grace's carriage."

Florimel and Georgiana accordingly took their leave of Lord and Lady Holderness; and the newly made peer, deprived of both his daughters, was left alone with his bride, — that snake with the lovely skin.

CHAPTER III

THE ROYAL GEORGE

TEN days had elapsed since the Magsman and Big Beggarman embarked on board the brig in the Mersey, and during that interval the ship had pursued its way toward the western hemisphere.

At first a favourable wind and tolerably fine weather had attended upon the course of the *Royal George*, and thus for a week considerable progress had been made in the voyage. But a change then took place: the steady breeze broke into fitful gusts of violent fury, the heavens grew black and menacing, the ocean rolled in dark and sombre waves, and every sign familiar to the seaman's experience denoted the coming storm.

Over the surface of the troubled main swept the screaming bird; and on the tenth evening the sun went down a deep blood-red colour, like a lamp of evil omen extinguishing beneath the mighty arch of heaven which now overhung the boundless ocean like a tremendous sheet of lead.

In the captain's cabin the Magsman and the Big Beggarman were seated at the table, upon which stood the drinking materials, that were prevented from falling off by a rim running above the surface all around the board; for the vessel was now tossing up and down on the undulating bosom of the Atlantic.

A lamp was suspended to the ceiling of the cabin; but through the stern windows the white crests of the billows could be discerned, like moving masses of snow gleaming in the obscurity, and from time to time the spray dashed against the thick glass.

The rapid trampling of the sailors upon deck, the responses which they gave to the commands which the

captain thundered forth, the rattling of the cordage, the shaking of masts and spars, the frequent fluttering of the sails, the din of the rudder beating occasionally against the stern of the vessel, the tremendous oscillation of the tiller, the straining of the timbers from one end of the vessel to the other, the changing voices in which the gale spoke, now dull, low, and mournful, as if with subdued moanings, then loud, bursting, gushing, roaring, raging, as it swept over the Atlantic, — these were the sounds which fell upon the ears of the two men as they sat smoking, drinking, and conversing alone together in the cabin.

And although their discourse was of a private and particular nature, no necessity was there to speak in whispers; for so great was the din without — in the ship, upon the ocean, and in the air — that there were intervals when the two men could not hear themselves speak; and thus, even if a listener had been stationed on the other side of the door, with his ear to the panels, he could not have overheard a syllable that was uttered in that cabin.

It was now about eight o'clock on this memorable evening, and the anger of the storm was rapidly increasing to a perfect fury.

But, comparatively unmoved by the elemental war, the Magsman and the Big Beggarman were deliberately digesting projects well suited to the appalling nature of the night that was heralded by a blood-red sunset and an evening of tempestuous heavens.

"Well, then, you're decided on doing it without any unnecessary delay?" said the Big Beggarman, as he refilled his pipe and pressed down the tobacco with his thumb.

"This very night, Stephen," responded the Magsman. "There's no use in waiting any longer, and since our plans are pretty well decided on —"

Here the gale drowned the remainder of his sentence.

"Now let us look the whole thing calmly and coolly in the face once more," said the Big Beggarman, after a long pause, "so that we may calculate all the chances that's for us and all that's against us."

"Good!" exclaimed Joe Warren; "there's nothing like holding a proper council of war. In the first place, then, we must reflect that you and me are only two on one side against the captain and nine men on the other."

"That's two against ten," observed the Big Beggarman, gloomily.

"And ten strong, sturdy fellers that don't know what fear is," added Joe Warren. "But this is only the dark side of the picture. The light side is more flattering than t'other is discouraging. In the first place, we must make away with the captain."

"That's easy enow," observed the Beggarman. "He has quite lost all his mistrust of us, and by waiting so patiently before we made up our minds to do anything or take any step, we've quite lulled asleep any suspicion that he might have entertained."

"You're right there, Stephen," responded the Magsman. "That he did look upon us in a very queer fashion at the beginning, is very certain, or else he wouldn't have made us give up our pistols the first night we were on board the ship. But by degrees his fears wore off, and then he let us go upon deck the second day and chat with the sailors. Well, our first move, as we were saying, is to make away with him; and then we must serve the chief mate in the same manner. That's not impossible to be done, as I explained to you yesterday."

"But then we shall have eight sturdy mariners to deal with," said the Beggarman.

"They'll be paralyzed when we tell them what we've done and what we mean to do," rejoined Warren, in a tone of desperate ferocity. "After all," he continued, at the expiration of a few minutes, during which a tremendous gust swept over the ocean and the vessel went careering down into the abyss like a maddened race-horse, then up the mighty steep of waters again at a far slower rate, "after all, we ain't the men to stand upon trifles, Stephen, and if it comes to the scratch, we must fight a bloody battle, even though the odds will be eight to two when the captain and first mate are put out of the way."

"Ay, it won't come to such a desperate combat, when we think calmly of the business," said the Big Beggarman. "The men will knock under as soon as they see that their chief officers are gone and that we're resolute. Besides, the hope of plunder and the excitement of the new kind of life which we shall propose to them —"

"That's the very point which I rely upon," ejaculated

the Magsman. "But let us still look at the worst. With arms in our hands, friend Stephen, there ain't two more formidable fellers on the face of this earth than we are —"

"Well, I rather think not," interrupted the Beggarman, complacently. "And as to getting the weapons to use in case of necessity, there won't be much difficulty on that score, for the captain always carries pistols secreted about him. That we know for a certainty."

"And there's always half a dozen cutlasses on deck, around the foot of the mainmast," added the Magsman; "for though the captain's suspicions have been lulled asleep, as you observed just now, he hasn't omitted the necessary precautions in case we should suddenly show our teeth. But his precautions will be our safeguard: that is to say, we shall know where to lay our hands upon weapons at the proper moment. After all said and done, I sha'n't be sorry, in the long run, that the nobleman, whoever he was, played us this infernal trick. The first night we came on board, when I opened the letter which I expected was to contain bank-notes for the fifteen hundred due to me, I was cursedly savage to find that it was a bill payable in New York only."

"And I wasn't best pleased when I opened my letter at the same time and found the same thing," observed the Beggarman. "It was a deuced good plant to compel us to go out to America and reconcile us to our fate in that respect. But we've hit upon a plan that'll upset all the nobleman's fine schemes," added the ruffian, with a horrible chuckle.

"I should think so indeed," exclaimed the Magsman. "We'll not only get our fifteen hundred pounds each in New York, but we'll also get the ship and everything in her. The cargo must be worth some thousands. And, therefore, as I was saying just now, I'm not so particularly sorry, after all, that his unknown lordship has tried this plant upon us. Had we received our money in good bank-notes upon coming on board, and if no restraint had been put upon us, we should have quietly left the ship again and stepped back on British ground, contented with the cash we'd realized. But now the treachery practised toward us has instigated us to treachery likewise, and there's more than one person that'll be made to rue the —"

Here the Magsman's voice was drowned in the roar of the

tempest, which increased a thousandfold all the terrible noises that we have enumerated above.

But soon after the rage of that tremendous gust had spent itself, there was a long interval of comparative lull; and, the door of the cabin suddenly opening, the captain of the vessel made his appearance.

His rough garments were shining with the spray which had dashed over him, the water dropped from the wide brim of the low glazed hat which he had substituted for his cap with the gold-lace band, and his dripping hair hung lanky and straight over his ears. His countenance was more rubicund than ever; and his aspect altogether was that of the weather-beaten, sturdy tar to whom storms were familiar and tempests a source of not unpleasurable excitement.

"Well, my hearties," he exclaimed, in a voice which was hoarse and thick from the effects of bawling out his orders upon the deck amidst the din of the elements, "you manage to make yourselves pretty comfortable, eh? That's all right, and I thought I'd just step down to see how you was both getting on. It blows great guns, by jingo!"

"Won't it be a nasty night, captain?" demanded the Magsman.

"Rough enow," was the laconic response, as the captain shook himself like a dog just emerged from the water. "But there's nothin' to fear, my hearties," he added, at the expiration of a few moments. "A good ship and plenty of sea-room — that's all one wants to make everything safe and trim."

"You'll take a dram, captain, eh?" said the Big Beggarman.

"Just to keep the cold out," observed Joe Warren. "Come, sit down there, and I'll mix a stinger for you."

"Well, I don't mind staying a minute or two with you," returned the skipper, taking the seat which the Magsman officiously vacated for his accommodation. Then, pulling off his hat and unbuttoning his heavy pea-jacket, he said, "This is the eleventh voyage I've made in this here boat across the Atlantic without any mishap, and so I'll drink success to the present ventur'."

"And we'll all jine in," observed the Big Beggarman, catching the rapid glance of terrible significancy which the Magsman at the same moment darted upon him.

"Well, here's success, then," said the captain, raising to his lips the tumbler which Joe Warren had filled with grog for his behoof.

"I shall drink that toast in a bumper," exclaimed the Beggarman, helping himself to a copious supply of the rum.

"And so will I," said the Magsman, receiving the bottle from his friend's hand.

But, quick as thought, and as if suddenly obeying a galvanic impulse, Joe Warren grasped the bottle by the neck and raised it above his head as if it were a short club. The captain perceived the movement in an instant, saw the intended treachery, and sprang to his feet, thus encountering, as it were, half-way the tremendous blow which the ruffian dealt him with the bottle. Crash it descended upon the seaman's head, and into a thousand pieces it flew. A cry burst from the victim's lips as he staggered back, the blood pouring down his face and blinding him with its sanguine flood; and, although half-stunned, he mechanically thrust one hand into the inner pocket of his pea-jacket to clutch a pistol.

But, like a tiger springing upon its prey from the thicket of an Indian jungle, or as the boa-constrictor flings itself from a bough on the traveller passing beneath, did the Magsman rush upon the doomed mariner. Down they fell together, a savage growl escaping from Joe Warren's breast; and at the same moment the Big Beggarman, falling on his knees, fixed his iron grasp upon the captain's throat.

Like two demons did the murderers appear as they did their awful work, one keeping the victim down, despite of his desperate struggles and agonized writhings, the other throttling him in his savage gripe; the former gnashing his teeth and foaming at the mouth with the ferocious excitement of the deed, the latter with compressed lips and corrugated brows indicating all the tremendous power of the muscular energy which his entire frame furnished to accomplish the task of strangulation.

And in the meantime the roar of the tempest had recommenced, and the terrors of the storm were added to the horrors of that foul iniquity.

'Twas done, and the captain lay lifeless on the cabin-floor, his countenance livid and blue, his eyes starting from their bloody sockets.

Springing to their feet when they were assured that the death-struggle was ended, the two murderers took possession of their victim's pistols. Then they opened one of the stern-windows, and, raising the corpse between them, they thrust it forth into the ocean, which was now lashing itself up into foaming fury. The waters sucked in the dead body, and at the same instant a tremendous wave beat against the stern of the vessel. To draw down the wooden lids protecting the ports in which the windows were set was now the work of a few moments with the Magsman and the Big Beggarman; and having done this, their eyes met with looks of savage triumph, as they saw in the assassination of the captain the accomplishment of the first and most important step in their grand nefarious scheme.

"Now, Stephen," said the Magsman, as he examined the priming of the pistols and assured himself that it was quite dry, the great rough coat of the captain having effectually defended the weapons from the spray which had beaten over their owner when he was alive and performing his duty upon the deck, "now, Stephen, you must go up above and play your part, as already agreed on."

"I understand, old feller," responded the Big Beggarman, putting on his hat as firmly as possible so as to encounter the fury of the gale. Then, having tossed off a dram of raw spirit, he quitted the cabin, closing the door behind him.

On ascending to the deck, the atmosphere was at first so dark that the Big Beggarman could distinguish nothing: all seemed black as if the air were a solid mass of pitch. But in a few moments his eyes began to grow accustomed to that dense obscurity, and the masts, spars, and cordage gradually stood out in lines of jet against the inky sky. The forms of the seamen appeared like black objects of uncouth shape, and the bulwarks of the vessel stretched forward on either side until they seemed lost in the darkness at the farther extremity.

The wind was howling, sweeping, and roaring in all the variations of its voice of terror; the spray beat over the deck, and the motion of the ship was so great that the Big Beggarman would have speedily lost his balance had he not in the first instance clung to a rope, and then made a rush, as it were, to the mainmast.

Unobserved by the sailors, who were bustling about performing the orders issued from the lips of the first mate,

the Big Beggarman hastily secured under his coat all the cutlasses which were kept in a rack upon the after-deck. He then availed himself of a temporary lull in the hurricane to make his way up to the spot where the chief mate was standing, and, in a tone of apparent frankness and haste, he said, "The captain has been taken suddenly ill down in the cabin, sir, and wants to speak to you directly."

"The deuce! what's the matter with him?" demanded the chief mate.

"He was seized with a shivering all over and fell down in a sort of fit," was the Big Beggarman's ready response. "But he's rallied a little, by having rum poured down his throat, and now he wants to speak to you."

The mate, totally unsuspecting of treachery, instantly summoned Mr. Watkins, a subordinate officer, whom he ordered to take charge of the ship for a few minutes; and he then hastened down the companion-ladder, the Big Beggarman following close behind him. Opening the door, he entered the cabin; but scarcely had he crossed the threshold when he was knocked down by a huge bludgeon which the Magsman had obtained by breaking off the leg of a stool. The Big Beggarman rushed in, shut the door behind him, and, drawing a cutlass, made a desperate sweep with the trenchant blade at the unfortunate officer as he was starting up from the floor. A yell of agony rang from the victim's lips, a yell which reached not the ears of those on deck, or, if it did, was mistaken for one of the thousand tones in which the voice of the tempest speaks upon the ocean. But even before that appalling sound had ceased to vibrate on the ears of the murderers in the cabin, their terrible work was accomplished, the deed was done, and the mate became the second victim of the tremendous tragedy of this night of horrors.

From one of the stern-windows the gory corpse was thrust into the ocean, and once more did the assassins exchange looks of ferocious satisfaction and diabolical triumph.

But now came the most hazardous portion of their enterprise, — a crisis which must decide the attitude that the crew would take toward them. Still the miscreants quailed not in the presence of the danger which they were incurring; but enhancing their natural courage by means of the artificial stimulant supplied by the burning alcohol which they poured

copiously down their throats, they prepared for the worst with an undaunted energy worthy of a better cause.

Each arming himself with a drawn cutlass and a loaded pistol, and having secreted the other swords in the bedding of one of their cots, so that those weapons should not at least become immediately available to the sailors, the Magsman and the Big Beggarman ascended to the deck.

Watkins, the second mate, who had been left in charge of the ship, was standing close by the man at the wheel; and the other sailors were distributed about in different parts of the vessel, according to the nature of the duties which they were at the moment called upon to perform.

The instant Joe Warren and the Beggarman put their feet upon the deck, they hastily accosted the second mate and the steersman; and presenting their pistols, exclaimed, "Dare to move from your posts and we will blow your brains out. Silence, speak not a word, and your lives shall be spared."

The suddenness of a proceeding so utterly unexpected, the determined manner in which the two ruffians spoke, and the cold contact of the muzzles of the pistols against the foreheads of Watkins and the steersman so completely astounded these individuals that the injunction of silence was in reality perfectly unnecessary: terror and amazement had already sealed their lips.

"One word is as good as twenty," said Joe Warren, now acting as spokesman. "The truth is, then, that we have made away with the captain and the first mate, and we mean to take possession of the ship, or die in the attempt. If you fall into our views, well and good. We'll sell the cargo first, share the spoil, and then hoist the black flag and turn pirates. But if you resist, we'll continue the bloody work that's already begun, by murdering you both. Now what say you?"

"Who's to command the ship?" inquired Watkins, who had by this time recovered his presence of mind and who now spoke with promptitude and decision.

"You shall be the captain," answered the Magsman, — "on particular conditions; and Bradley, the steersman, shall be first mate. Now, then, speak, what say you?"

"I agree," returned Watkins, unhesitatingly.

"And so do I," said the helmsman, whose name was Bradley.

"You both swear most solemnly that you fall into our views?" demanded the Magsman.

"We swear," was the resolute and firm response.

"All right!" exclaimed the Magsman, withdrawing his pistol from its menacing vicinage to the head of Watkins, while the Big Beggarman simultaneously released Bradley from the like state of jeopardy.

The scene which we have just related scarcely occupied two minutes. The action was prompt, the discourse was rapid, brief, and to the point, and the understanding was therefore speedily come to and settled. None of the other sailors had overheard the conversation or noticed that anything unusual was going forward; for, in the first place, they were too far off to be within ear-shot of the words spoken on the after-part of the deck, especially in the midst of a roaring sea and a gushing hurricane, and, secondly, the night was much too dark to permit them to catch even a glimpse of the naked cutlasses or the pistols which the two murderers wielded. There were thus six more men in the ship to win over by fair means or coerce by foul, and Joe Warren did not doubt a successful issue to the adventure in either case.

"Now summon three of the men, captain," he said to Watkins, "and tell them what has occurred."

This order was instantly obeyed; and the three sailors whom Watkins called aft heard, with mingled feelings of terror and surprise, that a mutiny had taken place on board, that their legitimate commander and first mate had been murdered, and that their adhesion was required to the new condition of things, under peril of their own lives. Two of them, influenced by the promises made and the hopes held out, instantaneously signified their assent, while fear induced the third to adopt a similar course. They were then ordered to stand aside, while the remaining three sailors were summoned in their turn to receive the startling communication of all that had occurred on board within the previous quarter of an hour; and the result was completely satisfactory to the Magsman and the Big Beggarman.

Copious allowances of spirits were now dealt around, and the tragic mutiny was succeeded by boisterous hilarity on board of the *Royal George*.

But still the storm continued; the wind swept in tremendous gusts over the Atlantic, whose bosom was upheaved into waves that ran mountains high, and presently the lightning flashed forth in vivid brilliancy, and the thunder rolled with a crashing din, as if a thousand chariots were tearing along a brazen bridge.

CHAPTER IV

THE PORTRAIT

WE now return to the Countess of Desborough, that charming, beautiful, and strong-minded woman, whose passions were, however, more potent than her reason, and whose temperament had plunged her, after many, many successful struggles against temptation, into the vortex of love's voluptuous enjoyments.

For the attachment which she cherished toward Ramsey amounted to a fervent enthusiasm that would have conducted her all-smiling to the stake, had it been necessary to die for him, — a love not only arising from a sense of his manly beauty and from the happiness enjoyed in the burning moments of sensual delight, but also from admiration of those graces of manner and intellect which so preëminently characterized the resuscitated convict.

Three weeks had elapsed since accident first threw in her way the man whom she knew only as Gustavus Wakefield, and a fortnight had now passed since she surrendered herself to his arms. During this period her love had become enhanced into a frenzy, and her husband must have been perfectly blind if he had not perceived the worship with which his beauteous Eleanor regarded their guest. But she had never once paused to reflect whether her conduct were not calculated to excite her husband's suspicions. Yielding to the torrent of pleasure and ecstasy that bore her soul along and bathed her senses in a tide of unutterable bliss, she had no thought for anything save this delirious dream of delight, no consideration for any one save the man who had thus suddenly become the emperor of her heart.

It will be remembered that Fernanda Aylmer returned to her uncle's mansion immediately after the failure of the

midnight attempt which she made to poison Arthur Eaton, on that occasion when William Dudley introduced her to his young master's apartment; but, having remained for a few days beneath the roof of her noble relatives, Fernanda departed suddenly, with the avowed intention of visiting the earl's seat in Derbyshire. It was on the morning of the very day when his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales dined with Lord and Lady Desborough that Fernanda had thus quitted the mansion in Berkeley Square; and from that time her relatives had heard little concerning her, until the astounding intelligence was conveyed to them, by means of a hurried note which she had written, that she had become the wife of Mr. Clarendon, or rather, Lord Holderness.

The Earl of Desborough, when he began to reflect calmly upon the matter, was not sorry that his wayward, volatile, and perverse tempered niece had thus settled herself in life, and at all events formed an honourable connection; and he could not help thinking that Arthur Eaton had experienced a somewhat fortunate escape in being refused by a young lady of so strange, wild, and self-willed a disposition. As for the Countess of Desborough, she was too much absorbed in her passion for Ramsey to devote many minutes' thought to Fernanda; and, moreover, on the Saturday evening when the tidings of the young lady's marriage reached Berkeley Square, Eleanor was completely wrapped up in the enjoyment of her lover's society after an absence of three days on his part.

For our readers will remember that on the previous Thursday night Ramsey had appeared to Mr. and Mrs. Page in the library at Stamford Manor; and that visit to the neighbourhood of Aylesbury had certain objects which will transpire hereafter.

On the Saturday evening he came back to Berkeley Square, — his departure and his return both taking place at dusk, when his countenance might be effectually concealed by the shadow of his hat and the collar of his cloak. But need we say that in the meantime his absence had appeared an age to the enamoured Eleanor, and the three days had seemed as many centuries? All the next day she remained at home, on purpose to enjoy his society, the excuses which he made for not going out proving quite satisfactory to herself, and eliciting no remark on the side of her husband.

Indeed, the Earl of Desborough had sought the solitude of his library more than ever since the arrival of Ramsey at the mansion; and had Eleanor found leisure to observe her husband's manner or notice his personal appearance with any degree of attention, she would have perceived beneath an air of extreme kindness toward herself and of affability toward her lover there was a profound melancholy devouring the nobleman's very vitals, and that his cheeks were growing pale, his form emaciated, and his brow furrowed, with a rapidity that was but too awfully perceptible to all about him save his own adulterous wife and her unprincipled paramour.

Having recorded these few necessary observations, we now resume the thread of our narrative.

It was on the Monday following the Saturday on which Ramsey had returned to his comfortable quarters in Berkeley Square, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon we find him seated in the drawing-room with the lovely and loving Countess of Desborough.

Her ladyship had instructed the domestics that she was not "at home" to any visitors; and she was accordingly giving herself up to all the blandishments of a *tête-à-tête* with him whom she called her "dear Gustavus." Her splendid eyes looked burning fondness and enthusiastic passion upon him, while his reflected the more sensual feeling and fixed their gaze on her countenance with a fervour which she mistook for unalloyed affection as profound and intense as her own.

Never had she seemed more beautiful, nor he more handsome; and, so far as personal appearance went, there was a remarkable fitness in this couple for each other. Their dark hair, olive complexions, large black eyes, brilliant teeth, and classical outline of feature, made them look like brother and sister; while the ardour of their temperament and the strength of the fires that burned within their breasts rendered them suitable partners in the dalliance of love.

"Tell me, my Gustavus, do you indeed entertain for me all the fondness which breathes in your words and gives a glory to your looks?" asked Eleanor, in a tone that was low and tremulous with the soft feelings that prompted the question.

"Can you doubt my love? Do you suspect the truth of

my vows?" said Ramsey, modulating his own voice to the tender sensuousness of the scene; and, taking the hand of the countess, he fastened his lips upon the warm, plump flesh, which thrilled with the ecstatic fervour that animated her entire being. "Should not I rather question you, my beloved Eleanor," he continued, "respecting the permanence of that attachment which you now feel toward the friendless stranger?"

"Ah! how can you speak in this mournful, hopeless manner of yourself, Gustavus?" exclaimed the countess, darting upon him a look of mingled devotedness and reproach. "Wherefore use the word friendless? Am not I your friend? Would I not lay down my life to serve you? Oh, my beloved Gustavus, you had forgotten that there was such a being as myself in the world when you made that observation."

"Pardon me, dearest, dearest Eleanor," said the resuscitated criminal, folding that charming and elegant woman in his embrace and imprinting a thousand kisses upon her glowing, burning, blushing cheeks. "I had not forgotten you," he continued, in the murmuring tone which indicates the strength of sensual passion. "No, never, never can I forget you, my beloved; never can I cease to remember that you are the only being whom I ever truly adored and by whom I was ever loved so tenderly in return. All my hopes of happiness are centred in thee, Eleanor. Were I doomed to separate from thee, my well-beloved, I should end my days in the blood of a distracted suicide."

"Oh, speak not in such dreadful terms as these!" whispered the countess, her own voice being subdued and hushed by the power of her passion; and, half-reclining in his arms, she gazed long and ardently upon the handsome countenance of her lover, while the beatings of her heart were plainly audible to the ears of both. "Wherefore should you entertain an idea of even the possibility of our separation? Are you not happy beneath this roof? Do you pant for change, Gustavus?"

"No, no; ten thousand times no, my angel," he responded, accompanying his words with fervid caresses. "How can I possibly pant for change? Oh, no! no! But ask yourself, dearest Eleanor, whether this state of bliss can endure for ever? Does it not appear like a

dream which must inevitably have a waking? Your husband — ”

“ Oh, let us not talk of him,” exclaimed the countess, with a movement of impatience. “ Ever since I possessed your love, Gustavus, I have experienced feelings amounting almost to a loathing and a bitter aversion in respect to him.”

“ I can well understand those emotions, sweet Eleanor,” answered the wily criminal; “ but you must pardon me if I persist in speaking of the earl for a few moments. Oh, cannot you guess what I mean? Can you not divine that I allude to the possibility of our love being discovered? Each day, each hour we become less guarded. Already has that possibility amounted to a probability, and in another week or ten days it will be an inevitable certainty. Will not the time come then, my ever dear Eleanor, when we must look all this in the face and determine how to meet the emergency? And will it not be better to find ourselves prepared how to act, instead of being left to the irresolution which invariably accompanies the excitement and the confusion of a sudden discovery? Nay, more, would it not be even preferable to anticipate the catastrophe? ”

“ To what do you allude? What do you mean? ” demanded the countess, now for the first time awakening somewhat from her delicious dreams of bliss, and starting back almost in affright from the precipice on which she found herself standing. “ You have some plan in your mind, some project, Gustavus — ”

“ Hear me calmly, my love,” interrupted Ramsey, again lavishing upon the charming patrician lady the most tender and ardent caresses, so that the cheek which rested against his own glowed with animation, and the eyes which looked up into his were filled with a lustrous languor, melting yet full of fire. “ I beseech and implore you to contemplate, dear Eleanor, the results of a discovery,” he continued. “ My ignominious expulsion from the house would be the first step taken by your enraged husband, and who knows but that he might sacrifice you to his fury? Then, oh, then, what would become of me? I should destroy myself, and our love would terminate as fatally as our deaths would be premature.”

“ Alas! alas! there is indeed much truth in this prophetic picture which you have drawn, Gustavus,” exclaimed

Eleanor, snatching herself from his embrace and gazing upon him in mingled terror and entreaty. "Tell me, oh, tell me, I conjure you, what course you would have us adopt, what plan you would recommend."

"Eleanor," said Ramsey, in a tone that was solemn and even awe-inspiring, "you have given me every proof of an ardent love, and you have declared that you would die to serve me. But you shall live to bless me: we will live for each other. Oh, can you not comprehend what I would suggest? Do you not understand the nature of the sacrifice which you must make for this love of ours?"

"Speak, speak, Gustavus!" exclaimed the countess, vehemently. "What would you have me do?"

"Fly with me!" was the resolute and yet solemn answer.

"Oh, my God, must it come to that?" cried the lady, bursting into tears and wringing her hands. "Must this love of ours bring disgrace upon me —"

"If you hesitate, Eleanor," interrupted Ramsey, "it is that you love me less than you love the brilliant position which you occupy in the world of fashion. In this case I will leave you, the sooner the better, ere my heart breaks —"

"Leave me! Oh, cruel Gustavus, why give utterance to such menaces?" exclaimed Eleanor, painfully excited. "No, you shall not leave me, we will not separate. I am happy with you, I shall be wretched without you. What to me is the gay and splendid sphere of rank and fashion? Have I not abandoned it for these two weeks past in order to be constantly in your society? Oh, you know not yet how profound is woman's love, you have not learned to appreciate the immensity of her affection. But I will teach you the lesson, Gustavus, and you shall receive from me a far greater proof of my tenderness than any I have yet been able to afford you. For I will surrender my good name in order that I may keep your love, I will fling fame and reputation to the winds, sooner than be separated from thee. Yes, all that woman values most dearly will I resign for your sake, — home, friends, relations, and the world's adulation, and, what is more still, the world's respect. Now will you believe that I love you?"

And as she gave utterance to these last words the patrician lady started from her seat, and drawing herself up to the full of her queenlike stature and her noble height,

she appeared radiant with triumph and overpoweringly beautiful in the Olympian effulgence which the glowing animation of her cheeks and the lustre of her eyes shed around her.

Oh, the broken ties of sacred matrimony, a ruined reputation, a cast-away future, — all, all were now dared and defied by this nobly born woman who was courageous enough to immolate everything dear upon the altar of her still dearer love.

"Eleanor, I thank you; my God! I thank you, from the depths of my soul," exclaimed Ramsey, sinking at her feet and covering her hand with kisses.

"Rise, my well-beloved," she said, little dreaming how much of theatrical effect there was in his proceeding, but judging him by her own fervid sincerity and profound enthusiasm. "What I have pledged myself to do I will perform without a murmur, and the sooner the better, now that my resolution is taken. Pardon me, then," she continued, in a more subdued tone and with a sudden embarrassment of manner, as she pressed her lover's hand affectionately, "pardon me if I now turn the conversation for a moment upon things of worldly importance only. But it is necessary that I should inform you, my beloved Gustavus, that I am not independent of my husband in a pecuniary sense. A few hundreds of pounds, my jewels, these are all the wealth that I can take away with me; and I know that for the present your circumstances are not as prosperous as I could wish them to be."

"But I am young, and I am not wanting in certain intellectual qualifications," answered Ramsey. "I possess a perfect knowledge of the French language, and in the United States of America I may hope, as a tutor or as a translator, to earn a livelihood. And then, in addition to all this, I think I may safely say that by means of certain deeds in my possession I may obtain a considerable sum of money."

"Oh, it grieves me to think that we are compelled to speak of the dross of this world in the same breath with love, which is the gold of the heart's feelings," exclaimed Eleanor. "Enough, then, upon that subject. You know my position, Gustavus; you are aware that it is little more than my profound affection which I can bestow upon thee. Oh, if my fortune were as immense as my love for thee, the wealth

of the Indies would be pauperism in comparison therewith."

" 'Tis thy love only which I seek, Eleanor," responded the treacherous criminal, as he strained that confiding and noble-hearted woman to his tainted breast.

They now resumed their seats upon the sofa, composed their countenances and their feelings as well as they were able, — and oh, how different were those feelings that animated them! — and they then began to settle their plans for an early flight from the British capital and from the English shores.

But in the midst of this conversation the Earl of Desborough entered the room; and, actually torturing his inward being with the efforts that he made to assume a calm and even smiling exterior, the deeply to be pitied nobleman said, " That young artist, Eleanor, in whom, as you are aware, I have taken some interest, has brought a portrait which he wishes to exhibit to us. He assures me it is one of rather a startling character, though merely a portrait; but more, he will not tell me until he removes the cloth which covers it. Will you not gratify his very pardonable vanity by consenting to inspect this work of art? And perhaps Mr. Wakefield will likewise honour him?" added the earl, turning toward Ramsey.

" I should have much pleasure, my lord," replied this individual, who invariably found some handy excuse for avoiding a meeting with any strangers who visited the mansion, " but I have a letter to write, of some importance, too, and I perceive," he exclaimed, glancing toward the time-piece on the mantel, " that I shall scarcely be enabled to save the post."

Thus speaking, he bowed and quitted the room.

" You will accompany me, Eleanor, to the parlour, where Mr. Woodfall is waiting my return and your presence?" said the earl, taking his wife's hand.

" Oh, certainly, if it will give you pleasure, Francis," she replied, a sudden emotion of pity, and even of remorse, springing up in her bosom at the idea that in a few hours she was to desert and abandon for ever the husband whose conduct had been characterized by unvarying kindness, generosity, and indulgence toward her.

The earl grasped her hand somewhat tightly, as if with

the impulse of one who feels that the hand so held in his own is trembling, and would therefore give it a reassuring pressure; then, leading her away from the room, the nobleman conducted his beauteous wife to the apartment where George Woodfall was seated.

The artist rose and bowed respectfully to the Countess of Desborough.

"Your ladyship will deem me very presumptuous," he said, "in venturing to solicit you to inspect that portrait," and he pointed toward the picture as it stood against a chair, wrapped up in the cloth in which he had brought it; "but as I believe that I have been more successful in this achievement than in any former effort of my pencil, I was vain enough to hope that your ladyship, and you also, my lord, would not be angry with me for submitting it to your opinion. It is a portrait, nothing more than a portrait, but the portrait of a great criminal whose name recently produced no inconsiderable sensation throughout the country."

"And who may the hero of your picture be, Mr. Woodfall?" inquired the nobleman.

"Your lordship remembers the romantic trial in which the Aylesbury bankers figured as the culprits and Sir Richard Stamford as the prosecutor?" said the artist, interrogatively.

"Oh, perfectly well," was the earl's prompt reply.

"And I, who cannot bear to read the accounts of criminal proceedings," observed Eleanor, "was deeply, or rather, fearfully interested in that extraordinary trial. A lady of my acquaintance was present in the chapel on the morning when the condemned sermon was preached; and she assured me that one of the prisoners — Mr. Ramsey, I think — was a young man whose external appearance aroused feelings of the profoundest sympathy."

"I also was present on the sad occasion to which your ladyship alludes," said George Woodfall; "and it is Mr. Ramsey's portrait which I have painted, from the recollection of his features. So vividly did they become impressed upon my memory that I can at least take credit to myself for the fidelity of the delineation, whatever may be thought of the general workmanship."

Thus speaking, the young artist loosened the knots where the corners of the cloth were tied, and in a few moments withdrew the covering altogether.

The portrait was now revealed.

But, oh, horror! oh, the agonies, the appalling agonies of that moment, alike for the unhappy earl and the maddened Countess of Desborough!

An ejaculation of despair burst from the former; but a wild cry, whose thrilling intonations betrayed all the excruciating anguish which tore her breast, broke from the lips of Eleanor, and, reeling half-around, she fell senseless on the carpet.

"Cover up your picture — bear it away — this moment," said the earl, in a thick, hoarse tone, and with a look of indescribable horror, as he grasped Woodfall's arm convulsively. "We have recognized in that portrait some one whom we knew — under another name — and in earlier years — But no matter," he exclaimed, suddenly checking himself, lest in the excuses which he was attempting he might let drop something calculated to engender strange suspicions in the mind of the artist. "Pray leave us, Mr. Woodfall — pardon this scene — do not mention it elsewhere — it is very painful — and come and see me again in a day or two."

While the nobleman was thus speaking, in hurried and disjointed sentences and with a dreadful excitement of manner, Woodfall had replaced the covering over his picture; and he quitted the apartment just as the domestics, whose ears the thrilling scream of the countess had reached, rushed thither to see what had occurred.

CHAPTER V

THE OUTRAGED NOBLEMAN AND THE RESUSCITATED CRIMINAL

PHILIP RAMSEY, unconscious of the terrible scene which had just occurred and of the appalling discovery that had been made respecting his identity, was pacing his own chamber, not with the agitation of alarm or of annoyance, but with the excitement of triumph and the restlessness that invariably attends even upon the flush of a proud success.

He had so admirably played the hypocrite that the treason he contemplated was now approaching its consummation. The noble woman, so basely deceived, so treacherously beguiled, had promised to fly with him; the arrangements were settled, the plan was determined upon, and in a few hours would the appointed moment arrive at which she was to abandon her husband and her home for ever.

And why had the villain Ramsey thus plotted to annihilate all the little happiness that remained to the earl? Why had he thus drawn the infernal meshes of his duplicity and deceit so completely around the confiding and generous-hearted Eleanor that nought but the last and most irreparable of woman's sacrifices would now content him?

His conduct was the result of cold-blooded calculations; and these calculations may be explained in a few words.

He knew that it was impossible for him to remain for ever beneath the roof of the Earl of Desborough. An accident, the merest chance, the slightest casualty, would betray him. Moreover, even if the tremendous secret connected with his real name, his true history, and his resuscitation from an ignominious fate, even if this secret should remain undiscovered, was it not contrary to all rational hope that his

amour with the countess could continue much longer unsuspected or unperceived?

Thus, in either case and under any circumstances, Ramsey was living in the constant peril of expulsion from the home which he had found so miraculously and from the hospitality which he had abused so atrociously. The earl's bounty had supplied him with some ready money; but this amount was totally insufficient to enable him to escape from the country and fly to some foreign clime. And yet he must lose no time in thus ensuring his safety.

What, then, was to be done? He had calculated that the countess possessed costly jewels and at least some available pecuniary resources; and he resolved, therefore, to make her the companion of his flight. Besides, he had just so much regard for her as any profligate voluptuary experiences for a beautiful mistress; and he, moreover, thought it probable that a lady of her rank and connections would never be left by her relatives without some amount of income, happen what might.

These were the calculations which the cold-blooded villain had made; and the reader is now in possession of the key to his conduct with regard to Eleanor. We have shown how well he succeeded in overruling the last scruples which remained in the bosom of the too confiding lady, and how triumphant was his persuasion that she who had already surrendered to him her honour in secret would make a public sacrifice of home, reputation, friends, and relatives, for his sake.

Glorying in that success, rejoicing in that triumph, Philip Ramsey was pacing his apartment, when the door opened slowly and the Earl of Desborough staggered into his presence.

The ghastly pallor of the nobleman's countenance, the strange workings of his features, the wild expression of his eyes, the visible convulsion of his limbs, and the tottering unevenness in his pace, — all these appearances instantly struck Ramsey with dismay and carried to his guilty soul the terrible conviction that some appalling discovery had been made.

The earl closed the door carefully, locked it, and placed the key in his pocket.

A cold shudder passed over Ramsey's frame, for the idea

flashed to his mind that the outraged husband had discovered his wife's frailty and was come to wreak a deadly vengeance on him, the seducer.

But respecting this apprehension the wretch was almost immediately reassured; for the earl, pointing to a chair, while he himself sank exhausted upon another, said, "Be seated. Whatever now takes place between us must be without excitement, without noise, without passion."

"What does your lordship mean?" demanded Ramsey, with the eagerness of a torturing impatience to learn the extent of the evil which now appeared to menace him.

"I mean, sir," responded the nobleman, continuing to speak in a voice so charged with thickness and hoarseness that it sounded like the worn-out tones of old age, "I mean that the moment when any unguarded proceeding on our part shall make your secret public, that instant will disgrace and dishonour, scorn and ridicule, redound also upon me."

"Ah! my secret — then you know me?" murmured Ramsey, the frightful spasm which shot through his heart making him feel as if the hand of death were there; and he sank helplessly into the chair which he had been invited to take.

"Holy God! is it possible that such a tremendous misfortune should have fallen upon my head, upon that of my wife also?" exclaimed the earl, with a groan that convulsed his entire frame as anguish tore it from the depths of his soul. "But thou, unhappy man, in what haze of horror is thine existence enveloped? In what appalling mystery is thy fate involved? Thou, whom the world believes to be cold and stark in the narrow tomb —"

"In mercy, spare me!" cried Ramsey, suffering all the crucifixion of ineffable torture as these words struck like a barbed arrow into his heart; and, with eyes glaring wildly and brows hideously corrugated, his whole countenance was distorted as if his neck once more felt the pressure of the accursed noose.

"Well, well, I will seek no explanation on that head," said the nobleman, exercising a partial command over his feelings by dint of a tremendous and almost superhuman effort. "Little does it matter to me by what means you escaped the vengeance of the law. All my thoughts, all my ideas, all my feelings should be absorbed in the immense

amount of wanton and heartless injury which you have inflicted upon me."

"My lord, you will deal mercifully with me?" exclaimed Ramsey. "Am I not a worm already crushed so thoroughly beneath the iron heel of an avenging society that you can afford to spare, if not to pity me?"

"Spare you I will, pity you I cannot," rejoined the Earl of Desborough. "And in sparing you I act not through any considerations of mercy, but in order to avert a public scandal and the world's scorn from my house. The imposture you have practised upon me is venial, oh, yes, and your condition in that respect might indeed have commanded my pity; for, on that fatal night when you became an inmate of my dwelling, had you thrown yourself on your knees before me, revealed to me the astounding secret that you were Philip Ramsey the convict, and demanded my forbearance and my succour, I should not have refused your prayer. But you have planted a poisoned dagger in the bosom of my wife; you have made her not only an adulteress, but the paramour of a man whose neck has been circled by the halter of the gibbet. Oh, there is the accursed infamy of your conduct, there is the degradation, there is the damnable wrong which you have perpetrated."

And the nobleman, covering his face with his hands, broke forth into the bitterest lamentations.

But Ramsey saw that he was safe, that no positive retribution was intended, and that the earl was prepared to strain every nerve and put every possible violence upon his own feelings rather than suffer it to be known to the world that the resuscitated criminal had been his own friend and his wife's lover. Yes, all this the villain saw and comprehended; and so appalling had been his fears at first, that the joy occasioned by this assurance of impunity and sense of safety nearly overwhelmed him.

And now that he was thus relieved from the most rending apprehensions, he experienced an ardent curiosity to learn how everything had been so suddenly discovered. Could the countess have repented, and betrayed the secret of her amour and intended flight? No, that was a conjecture inconsistent with her character, her love, and her strength of mind. Besides, the idea would not account for the detection of his imposture as Gustavus Wakefield and his identity

as Philip Ramsey. How, then, was the discovery made? The mystery was impenetrable: it defied all the efforts of imagination. Not for an instant did it strike him that the visit of the artist and the exhibition of the picture could have any connection with the sudden catastrophe.

"Mr. Ramsey, or rather, Mr. Wakefield," resumed the earl, again exercising a mastery over his feelings, "for it makes my blood run cold in my veins to call you by the former name, matters have reached that appalling crisis when reproaches are a folly and an absurdity. No possible invective which my lips might frame could convey an idea of the tremendous sense of diabolical outrage which my soul experiences. Words are useless in dealing with such a case. The wrong is inflicted; its nature is horrible to contemplate. But, oh, with what excruciating bitterness of feeling must I admit that I myself was to a great extent the accessory to my own dishonour and to my wife's immeasurable shame. For I knew that you had become her paramour — My God! I knew it — and now my punishment is a hell of the heart's emotions."

And, springing from his seat, the earl began to pace the room with all the frantic agitation of one whose brain was turning.

But suddenly pausing in his demented walk, he confronted Ramsey, saying in a low, hoarse tone, "The sooner we separate, the better. In another hour it will be dusk, and my travelling-carriage will be at the door. If you consent to repair straight to Liverpool and thence embark for the United States, my purse is at your command."

"Greedily, gratefully do I embrace the opportunity," exclaimed the resuscitated.

"Talk not to me of gratitude, profane not good words by breathing them with your polluted lips," said the earl, his voice now suddenly changing to a passionate vehemence as he surveyed Ramsey with looks of indescribable disgust and abhorrence. "Here are five hundred pounds for your use," he exclaimed, tossing down a purse heavy with gold and rustling with bank-notes; "and, by the living God, if you venture to remain in England, if you do not proceed in my carriage direct to Liverpool and thence depart without delay for America, I will show you no more mercy, but proclaim the fact of your existence to the world, and set the blood-

hounds of justice to hunt you to that destruction which you have escaped once."

Having thus given vent to the menaces which his outraged feelings suggested, the Earl of Desborough quitted the room, banging the door violently behind him.

He repaired to his wife's chamber, which was darkened by the heavy curtains being drawn over the windows. Around the bed several persons were speaking in those solemn whispers in which words are exchanged by the couch of an invalid. Two physicians, a nurse, and three of the noble lady's female attendants were gathered there, watching the patient, who was sleeping, but with an uneasy and convulsing slumber.

"What was the cause of this sudden fit?" inquired one of the physicians, addressing himself to the principal lady's-maid.

"I do not know, sir," was the reply. "The earl and her ladyship were inspecting a picture in a room down-stairs, when suddenly a fearful shriek echoed through the house. We ran to the parlour from which it proceeded, and we found the earl dreadfully agitated and her ladyship insensible."

"Ah! some family matter, doubtless," observed the physician.

"Is there any danger, sir?" inquired the lady's-maid.

"The greatest danger," was the prompt reply. "Your noble mistress has received a shock which may end fatally, or perhaps impair the nervous system for the remainder of her days."

"Oh, my poor mistress!" sobbed the dependant, who was devotedly attached to Lady Desborough.

It was at this moment that the earl entered the room; and, advancing on tiptoe toward the bed, he fixed his eyes with mournful earnestness upon the countenance of his wife. The maid servants retired, and the nobleman, seating himself by the side of the couch, took Eleanor's hand in his own. It was cold, icy cold: he pressed it to his lips, he wept over it! Oh, the unhappy nobleman loved his wife tenderly, tenderly.

For upwards of an hour did he remain watching over her as she slept her troubled sleep. No rancour was in his thoughts with regard to her, no animosity in his looks;

but he was all love and affection and pity and compassion, that generous-hearted earl.

At length, as a sudden remembrance struck him, he looked at his watch; and, gently abandoning Eleanor's hand, which all this time he had retained in his own, he issued noiselessly from the room. Hastening to an apartment, the windows of which were in front of the house, he looked forth into the square.

The travelling-carriage was at the door; the postilion was already in the saddle.

A man, enveloped in a cloak, emerged from the house and entered the chaise, which immediately drove off, the occupant drawing up the blinds as it rolled away from the mansion.

Then some degree of relief was experienced by the Earl of Desborough, as he retraced his way to his wife's chamber; for the resuscitated criminal was no longer an inmate of his dwelling.

CHAPTER VI

ROSE FOSTER AGAIN

FIVE days had elapsed since that fatal night on which Rose Foster fell once more into the power of Mrs. Brace, and during this interval the orphan girl had been retained a close prisoner in a bedchamber the windows of which looked upon the small yard that lay between the two houses. The door was kept constantly locked, and thus all possible precautions were taken against another escape.

Harriet, the lady's-maid, took her up her meals at the proper hours; but, although civil and obliging in her general conduct, the domestic held her peace when questioned by the terrified girl respecting the meaning of this imprisonment and the ultimate objects which Mrs. Brace might have in view concerning her. Vainly did Rose implore, through Harriet, an interview with the milliner, whom she hoped to be able to move with her entreaties and her tears if she could only see her; but Mrs. Brace went not near the afflicted, bewildered, and almost heart-broken girl.

Oh, how heavily, how wearily, and how miserably passed the time! By day the hours dragged their slow length along as if they were interminable; and by night the maiden could not sleep, for not only did the bitterness of her sorrow chase away slumber, but she feared to close her eyes lest some treacherous advantage should be taken of the moments of unconsciousness. Tears moistened her pillow, burning tears of anguish, which afforded not the consolation that they usually impart when serving as a vent for grief, but tears which flowed, as it were, from a heart gushing with a fountain of unextinguishable woe.

What had she done, this poor helpless, harmless girl, to be thus cruelly persecuted? Had Heaven in her case forgotten

its pledge to protect the fatherless, or how had she deserved the infliction of so much misery? Her life had been pure and spotless; neither in word nor deed had she ever offended against God or man; and in those happier days which were gone, apparently never to be recalled, she had dispensed her charities with no niggard hand. The poor mendicant had never been turned unaided away from the door of her parents' dwelling; and there were many, many kind acts which Rose had performed in secret but which were recorded in heaven's high chancery to her account.

Alas! alas! she who had so frequently befriended the orphan was now the victim of a bitter persecution in her own orphan state. Cold and cheerless was the great world to her; unblessed seemed her lot, stern and rugged the path which her destiny traced out. A rose in beauty as well as in name, was she doomed to share the rose's fate and be plucked by the ruthless hand of the spoiler, to be scattered and strewn after having ministered to his evanescent caprice with its richness of perfume and its beauty of hue.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and Rose was seated in her prison-chamber, with her head leaning upon her hand and her eyes fixed vacantly upon the floor. There were books on the table, there was a harp in one corner of the room, and there were materials for fancy-work at hand; but to none of her favourite recreations could the orphan turn her mind or direct her attention. Too deeply absorbed was she in her own sorrows to be able to follow in imagination the afflictions of the heroine of a romance, too harsh were the discordant notes that vibrated in her heart to permit her feelings to hope that music would soothe them, and the hands that were now so often wrung in despair could not be tutored to ply the needle.

Miserable, very miserable was the orphan; and more than a hundred times in every hour did she wish that she was with her parents in that cold grave over which the roughest human foot may pass without injuring those who sleep beneath.

Suddenly the noise of the key turning in the lock fell upon the maiden's ear; and, starting from her reverie like a timid roe, she waited in breathless suspense and with affrighted looks for the presence of the visitor, this being an hour at which Harriet never was wont to make her appearance there.

The door opened, and Mrs. Brace advanced into the room

with a smiling countenance and all her usual affability of manner.

"My dear child," she said, taking the orphan's hand and looking kindly upon her, so kindly that she must have been a very fiend incarnate if the honey of her smiles were belied by the venom in her heart, "my dear child, I am come to see you at last. You have sent for me very often, but I have been so much engaged —"

"Oh, madam," exclaimed Rose, in a voice of the most touching pathos, withdrawing her hand at the same time, "if you had any hope to give me or any humane feeling to testify toward me, surely you could have spared one single moment to become the bearer of the good tidings. But we will not exchange unnecessary words. Tell me at once, tell me, I conjure you, am I to consider myself a prisoner any longer?"

"A prisoner' is not the proper term, my love," said the milliner, evasively. "You do not know who are your real friends, and therefore I was compelled to use a little restraint —"

"Compelled, madam!" exclaimed Rose. "Am I your slave, or your daughter, or your apprentice? No, I am none of these. By what shadow of right, then, do you exercise any control or coercion over me?"

"This is not language, my love, which it becomes you to utter or me to hear," said Mrs. Brace. "Do not excite yourself, I mean you no harm —"

"Madam," interrupted the orphan, with solemn earnestness of tone and manner, "you do not know who I really am, but I will tell you."

"Yes, my child, I am aware that Camilla Morton was but a feigned name," answered Mrs. Brace, "and that you are properly called Rose Foster. A sweet name is Rose, a name which I love dearly; and if you are a good girl and will only listen to reason, I will point out to you a path leading to such happiness that you will become the envy of all the other young ladies in my establishment."

"You know, then, who I am," said Rose, in a musing tone; "and yet you have no compassion upon the poor friendless orphan whose parents met with so dreadful a death. Oh, I am amazed, I am shocked; and if the world be full of such wickedness, suicide cannot possibly be a crime, inasmuch

as it is the only means which Heaven has placed in the power of the innocent and pure-minded to enable them to escape from ruin at the hands of the cruel, the profligate, and the unprincipled. But since you know who I am, Mrs. Brace," exclaimed the orphan, with passionate vehemence, "perhaps you are also aware that your friend, Mr. Harley, is none other than the Prince of Wales, the man whom circumstances point out as the moral murderer, although not the physical assassin, of my lamented parents."

"Hush, my dear child, in the name of God! Do not talk in this wild and dreadful manner," said the milliner. "His Royal Highness wishes to see you, to throw himself at your feet, implore your pardon for the past, and learn in what way he can serve you for the future. Oh, you will find him contrite and full of sincere regrets; and it will now be his joy and happiness, as well as his duty, to atone for all the sufferings which you have endured through any misconduct or indiscretion on his part."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Rose, who, despite of the bitter experience which she had recently had of human perfidy, was still too artless, ingenuous, and confiding to suppose that the world's iniquity, hypocrisy, and deception could extend much further.

"It is so possible, my dear child," answered Mrs. Brace, "that his Royal Highness will be here in an hour to confirm all I have just told you. Compose yourself, therefore, to receive him, and you will yet find that much happiness is in store for you."

Having thus spoken, the milliner pressed the young maiden's hand, and hurried from the room; but as the key once more turned in the lock, a damp fell suddenly on the orphan's spirits and a secret voice appeared to whisper to her that she was again betrayed.

Yes, a flood of misgivings poured in unto her soul: for why should she still be retained captive, and why was the prince about to visit her in that bedchamber?

But now a desperate energy nerved the friendless girl; and, remembering with a species of heroic exultation the tremendous exploit that had saved her on the former occasion, she looked around for the means of escape. Alas! none met her view, no plan suggested itself. Useless were it to dare a second descent from the window. Such a proceeding

would only land her in the yard, where her recapture must be inevitable.

But, ah! what hope is this which strikes her? What scheme suddenly springs into existence in her mind?

Wild and romantic idea, and yet is it not feasible?

Yes; and she will attempt it without another instant's delay.

Seating herself at the table, she steadied her hand as well as she could to pen the following lines:

"Whoever finds this, let him at once hasten to succour a persecuted girl who is held prisoner in the dwelling of Mrs. Brace, the dressmaker of Pall Mall. To a constable admission will not dare be refused; and let no excuse or denial be received. The blessing of Heaven will wait upon you who may rescue from dishonour the orphan

"ROSE FOSTER."

Having written this hasty billet, she folded it up and concealed it for the present in her bosom.

Her next proceedings were promptly undertaken and skilfully executed. With a piece of whalebone taken from a pair of stays, and by means of some twisted silk, she made a bow; then, breaking off a thin rail from the back of a chair, she trimmed it with a knife until she reduced it to the degree of lightness fitting it to serve as an arrow. To the end of the stick she fastened her note, and opening the window gently, she shot the arrow completely over the roof of the adjacent house, so that she felt certain it must fall into St. James's Square.

Then closing the window, she cut off the silk from the whalebone and burned the thin shavings of the wood, so that not a trace of her proceeding remained visible inside the chamber.

Hope once more returned to the young maiden's bosom, for she looked upon the thought which had led to the step just adopted, as the inspiration of that Heaven which had not deserted her.

And, oh, in some minds, especially in those of youth, how elastic, how indestructible is hope! Sometimes, to be sure, it is but the last stand which the anguished soul makes against despair; and not very far removed from this case was the position of Rose Foster now.

For had she not received sufficient proof of the unprincipled character of the heir apparent and the extremes to which he was capable of venturing in order to gratify his passions or administer to his selfishness? Had not his heartlessness murdered her parents, and was she not compelled to risk her own life in an appalling manner to escape from his libidinous persecution?

All these reflections swept through the mind of the agitated girl, and nearly overwhelmed the hopes that had sprung up in her bosom; and as the moment approached at which his Royal Highness was to be there, a sense of colossal danger grew upon her with almost overwhelming effect.

At length she heard a stately step drawing near her chamber; the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and the Prince of Wales entered the room.

Closing the door behind him, he advanced with affable mien and extended hand toward the maiden, who stood motionless as a statue and pale as the sculptured marble too, but with her eyes fixed eagerly on his countenance, as if to read her doom in his features.

Then, whether it were that she beheld some sinister light in his eyes, or whether some secret presentiment confirmed all her fears and utterly annihilated all her hopes, we know not; but certain it is that, suddenly starting into full and agonized life from that statue-like stillness, Rose Foster threw herself on her knees before the prince, and, extending her clasped hands toward him, shrieked forth, "Mercy! mercy!"

"Silly maiden, of what are you afraid?" exclaimed his Royal Highness, hastening to raise her, or rather, endeavouring to do so; but she resisted his attempt, withdrawing violently the hands which he had seized in his own. "Miss Foster, for I know who you are," continued George, "I implore you to tranquillize yourself. Do not entertain so much mistrust concerning me. Do not look upon me with such cruel suspicion. Rise, I beseech you."

"Does your Royal Highness swear that you come hither with friendly intentions only?" demanded the terrified girl, still remaining upon her knees, but averting herself almost shudderingly from the prince.

"I swear!" he exclaimed. "And now rise, Miss Foster, rise and give me your attention and your patience."

"If your Royal Highness be truly sincere," said Rose, raising herself up, "you will at once lead the way to another apartment."

And, as she uttered these words, she moved toward the door.

"Stay, Miss Foster, and hear me," cried the prince, interposing himself in such a manner that he effectually barred her passage from the room. "I must and will tell you all that I have to say."

"Not here, not here," ejaculated the maiden, her alarm rapidly heightening; and, as she spoke, she endeavoured to glide past the prince and gain the door.

But he seized her around the waist, and then a piercing shriek burst from her lips. A panic terror for an instant paralyzed the royal voluptuary, and the orphan escaped from his arms before his lips had polluted her virgin cheeks with their hot and lustful kisses. Again she sprang toward the door; but the prince, suddenly placing his back against it, exclaimed, "Miss Foster, I have said that you must and shall hear me, and, by Heaven! I will keep my word."

The unhappy girl, shrinking back in unspeakable terror, clasped her hands and fixed upon the heir apparent a look so full of earnest entreaty and pathetic appealing that had not his heart been made of the hardest granite those imploring eyes would have melted his callosity.

"Oh, will not your Royal Highness have pity upon me?" she exclaimed, once more falling upon her knees and addressing the unprincipled voluptuary in a rending tone. "My God! what have I done that your Royal Highness should become my bitterest enemy, my most relentless persecutor? All I ask is to be permitted to eat the bread of mine own honest industry; but you, yes, you, the heir to the throne of these realms, are resolved upon reducing me to misery, ruin, and despair. And, oh, blame me not if your own conduct now wrings bitter and reproachful words from my lips, but rather blame yourself for acting in a manner which compels me to remind your Royal Highness how cruelly, cruelly I have already suffered through you. Am I not an orphan, at the age of sixteen, deprived of those parents who loved me so well and whom I loved so tenderly in return, and does not their death lie at your door? O God! when I think of all this, my brain reels, my blood boils,

and I feel diabolical thoughts springing up in my mind, as if I craved for vengeance, I who have never even trodden upon a worm, much less inflicted an injury upon a human being."

And bending her head forward, the young maiden covered her face with her hands and burst into an agony of tears.

The prince stood irresolute; he knew not how to act. On the one hand, he was maddened by the desire to possess that lovely girl, who appeared to him even more charming than ever in the midst of the grief which convulsed her; but, on the other hand, the reproaches to which she had just given utterance, raised something like a feeling of remorse in his soul.

Nearly a minute passed, during which his Royal Highness remained leaning against the door, his eyes gloating upon the beauteous kneeling figure at his feet, and his compunctious feelings waging a severe struggle with his burning desires.

The violence of the orphan's grief having thus leisure to subside somewhat and the poignancy of her anguish to receive a slight mitigation, she withdrew her hands from her countenance, raised her eyes timidly, and was instantly struck by the expression of hesitation and uncertainty which was legibly depicted upon the features of her persecutor. A gleam of hope flashed to her soul; and starting to her feet once more, she hastily wiped away the tears, those drops of diamond dew that gave sweetness and softness to the light of the eyes on whose long lashes they hung.

"Your Royal Highness is touched by my appeal," she exclaimed, in a voice which was still broken by deep sobs, though during the intervals between those evidences of profoundly concentrated emotions it was tremulously clear and musically pathetic, "and you will not add to my afflictions by any outrage or wrong. Consider my position, great prince, and have mercy upon me. An orphan and friendless, I have no protector, no vindicator. Bitter, bitter, is my lot in this world, Heaven knows, and yet gall may be added to that bitterness, and my sorrows may be enhanced to despair. For, as there is a God above us, I vow that if disgrace and shame and ruin should overtake me, I will not survive that crowning misery, that consummating woe. No, never, never; but in a voluntary death, dark and terrible though the crime may be, will I end my wretched existence. Spare me, then,

spare me, great prince, and let me depart hence in safety. Do this, and I will forgive you for the past, I will cease to look upon you as the cause of my parents' death. Oh, spare me, spare me! On my knees again do I implore your Royal Highness to spare me."

"Will you hear me for a single moment?" exclaimed the prince, darting forward and sustaining her as she was about to sink into a suppliant posture once more. Then, ere the shriek of terror which rose to her lips had time to burst forth, he quitted the slight hold that he had laid upon her and resumed his leaning attitude against the door. "Now you perceive," he said, hastily, "that I am not unreasonable, that I can tutor myself to the exercise of forbearance, and that I deserve alike your attention and your patience."

"Speak, speak!" cried the trembling girl, casting down her eyes beneath the devouring looks of passion which he bent upon her. "What has your Royal Highness to say to me? Wherefore can you not be generous and grant my prayer at once?"

"Because I wish to make you a proposal, Rose," was the immediate response; "and I fervently hope, nay, I conjure you, that it may receive a calm and serious consideration."

"A proposal!" murmured the young orphan, with a cold shudder passing over her entire frame. "What proposal can the Prince of Wales have to make to an obscure, humble, and unhappy girl? Oh, none, none that is honourable and to which I ought to listen," she added, with wildness in her voice, her looks, and her manner.

"In the name of God, tranquillize yourself, if only for a few minutes," exclaimed the prince. "For it is precisely because you are obscure, humble, and unhappy that you should not turn a deaf ear to the words which I am about to utter. And start not when I declare that inasmuch as you are beautiful and good and virtuous, so do I love and esteem and admire you. But marriage is impossible — you know that I cannot address you with truthfulness and sincerity on that point; and the time for practising any duplicity or delusion toward you is past. What, then, do I propose? That you should consent to be unto me as a wife, though without the name; and to you will I conduct myself as a tender and affectionate lover. Wealth, luxury, and profusion shall surround you; a splendid mansion shall be

your residence, troops of menials shall attend upon you, ministering to your slightest wants, and when you roll through the park in your gorgeous equipage, who of all the beauties gathered there will be more envied, more admired, or more courted than the acknowledged mistress of the heir apparent to the British throne?"

The prince had been suffered to proceed uninterruptedly in his speech, because mingled shame and indignation had sealed the young virgin's lips, — shame at the thought that her character should be so lightly estimated as even to warrant the audacious proposal thus made to her, and indignation at the proposal itself. But as the prince continued in the development of his plan, a faintness crept upon the maiden's heart, and anger gave way to terror as the conviction was borne in unto her mind that the profligate persecutor was capable of any atrocity in order to obtain his ends. The colour came and went upon her cheeks a dozen times in a minute as these successive feelings and emotions agitated her bosom; but when his Royal Highness beheld her pale countenance suddenly suffusing with a warm blush, he in his gross nature mistook the cause, and fancied that his proposal was received with an augmenting pleasure that had to struggle against her virgin bashfulness.

Great was his surprise, therefore, ineffable was his amazement, when Rose Foster, suddenly inspired with the energy which is often furnished by despair, started from her trembling, timid attitude, drew herself up to the full of her graceful height, and extending her right arm toward him, exclaimed, in a tone of command, "Silence, and pollute the air no longer with those words which are as baleful as a pestilence."

Oh, grand in thy virgin dignity, overpowering in thy maiden modesty wast thou at that moment, thou lovely and pure-minded orphan girl! The royal voluptuary, unable to believe the evidence of his own ears and eyes, was staggered by thy words and amazed by thy demeanour. And beautiful, oh, incalculably beautiful was the effect of thy statuesque attitude and the noble expression of thy soft and touching features, at that moment animated with a sense of outrage and insult. Oh, deep, deep is the sympathy that we entertain for thee, thou virtuous and charming girl; and sooner than the hand of the spoiler shall grasp thee

rudely in the embrace of unhallowed lust, sooner than thy purity and thine innocence shall be sacrificed to the passions of thy persecutor, ay, and sooner than thou, with thine own consent, shall become the mistress of the royal profligate, we would see thee dead, laid in the cold grave, and we would ourselves exclaim, "Back, back to the realms of heaven, thou ray from Jehovah's brow!"

Yes, the prince was indeed amazed and staggered by the words and the demeanour of the young orphan; and before he could recover from the state of feeling into which he was thus thrown, she addressed him with a solemn and touching earnestness which would have evoked a generous response from any other individual.

"No words, Prince of Wales," said Rose Foster, "can describe the indignation with which I reject, nay, scorn and recoil from, the proposal which you have dared to make me. The ladies of the aristocracy may deem it an honour to become notorious as the prince's favourite wantons; but the humble daughter of the people turns in loathing and wrath from the bare idea of such ignominy. Oh, well does the nation know that the higher the grade, the less virtue is to be found in it; and the despised, scorned, tyrant-ridden, and starving millions may take to themselves credit for virtues unknown amongst their titled oppressors. Go, Prince of Wales, go amongst your duchesses, your marchionesses, and your countesses, and pay your court to them: you know full well that they will not refuse your love-suit, but will deem it an honour to surrender up all purity, innocence, and virtue at the shrine of royalty. Yes, go to them, but dare not to breathe the same tale in my ears. The daughters of the people know that shame and infamy, however highly gilded, are shame and infamy still, and that the tarnish of a frail woman's reputation shows through the costliest veil with which the bounty and profusion of a royal lover may seek to conceal it. Now then, Prince of Wales, be generous, be great, be good, and allow me to depart in safety. I will thank you for this act of mercy, if you will concede it; for though I may more properly call it a deed of justice, yet will I speak of it and regard it in the light of a bounteous and humane concession from a mighty prince toward an obscure and friendless orphan girl."

"By Heavens! I know not how to answer you, how to

deal with you, singular and incomprehensible creature that you are," exclaimed the heir apparent, who could not help thinking that if the maiden appeared ravishingly charming and profoundly interesting in the midst of her grief and tears, she was radiantly attractive and overpoweringly beautiful in the flush of her excitement and the goddess-like dignity of her attitude.

"In one word," she said, trembling inwardly through fear of a refusal, "I beseech your Royal Highness to suffer me to leave this room and this house, and everything that I have previously endured at your hands shall be forgotten."

"Oh, no, no," he exclaimed, his passion maddening him; "I cannot part with thee thus easily, thou adorable creature."

And springing forward, he caught the young maiden in his arms.

A piercing scream burst from her lips, and she struggled desperately to tear herself from his embrace. But, excited almost to a delirious pitch by the fury of his desires, he seemed like a madman bent upon accomplishing his aim without the slightest regard for the consequences; and the wretched girl found her strength failing her and her senses ebbing away, as every moment saw her struggles becoming weaker and her cries more subdued, while the triumph of the prince appeared more and more certain.

But suddenly the door was burst violently open, and Tim Meagles, followed by Melmoth, the working man, rushed into the chamber.

CHAPTER VII

THE FRIENDSHIP OF ROYALTY

To dash forward, hurl aside the Prince of Wales, and catch Rose Foster in his arms, — all this was the work of a single instant with Meagles; and when his Royal Highness, uttering a terrible imprecation, was about to spring upon his friend Tim and deal him a savage blow, Melmoth seized upon the heir apparent without hesitation, pinioning him fast, despite of the desperate struggles he made to extricate himself.

But scarcely was all this accomplished, and Rose had begun to murmur a few words of heartfelt thanks to her brave deliverer, when three men, armed with staves, entered the room, followed by Mrs. Brace's two footmen, the milliner herself, and Harriet, the lady's-maid.

The fact was that Meagles and Melmoth the working man, having been out together the whole morning instituting inquiries concerning Rose, were standing in St. James's Square deliberating what course they should pursue now, five days of research having already proved vain and fruitless, when they observed an arrow lying upon the pavement near the enclosure; and curiosity prompting them to pick it up, to their indescribable amazement they found the note which at once cleared up everything in respect to Miss Foster's hitherto unaccountable disappearance. But as Tim Meagles was well aware that Mrs. Brace's establishment was secretly patronized and protected by the Prince of Wales, and, moreover, as the law gave him no power to force his way into it without the countenance of some legal proceedings or the presence of some legal functionaries, he hastened to procure the assistance of three constables. These officers went with him and Melmoth to the house,

which they all unceremoniously entered; and, in spite of the remonstrances, threats, and entreaties of Mrs. Brace, a search was commenced throughout the premises. In a short time the screams issuing from a particular chamber led the party in that direction, but on Mrs. Brace's hurriedly whispering to Meagles that the prince was with Miss Foster and that a scandal must be avoided, he had ordered the constables to remain on the landing of the staircase, while he and Melmoth prosecuted the search by themselves. However, the noise of the struggling between Melmoth and the prince and the terrible imprecation to which the latter gave vent made the officers fear that violence was being used; and in order to adopt the necessary precautions to preserve the peace as well as to take any offender into custody, they hurried to the scene of action, despite the endeavours of the two tall footmen to hold them back and the entreaties of Mrs. Brace that they would not push their interference any farther.

The constables, who of course belonged to the parish, instantly recognized the Prince of Wales; and, their ideas of justice being as immediately absorbed in the notion that as kings can do no wrong, so the heirs of kings must be equally incapable of offending, they at once and without a moment's hesitation rushed to his rescue. Melmoth, the working man, was unceremoniously knocked down and laid senseless on the carpet by the heavy staves of the functionaries; and these legalized ruffians, having thus disposed of one of the persons who dared seek their assistance in order to interfere with the pleasures of his Royal Highness, thought that they could not possibly be doing the prince a greater service than by knocking down the other person in a similar style. Quick as lightning, therefore, were their bludgeons turned from Melmoth upon Meagles; and the brave defenders of poor Rose Foster were both stretched powerless at her feet.

So rapidly had this second act in the drama passed that the heir apparent had not the time, even if he had possessed the inclination, to interfere on behalf of Tim Meagles; and it was with a species of consternation that he beheld the sudden diversion created in his favour by the decided though inconsiderate course adopted by the constables.

A strange scene of confusion now followed. Rose Foster had fainted when she beheld her champions so summarily

and ferociously dealt with; and she was borne away by Mrs. Brace and Harriet to another chamber. Restoratives were administered to Tim Meagles and the working man and while these individuals were being recovered, the Prince of Wales paced the room with rapid and uneven steps, deliberating how he should act in regard to them.

That an irreconcilable breach had now suddenly occurred between himself and Meagles, was evident; and he knew Tim quite well enough to be aware that he was capable of proving as dangerous an enemy as he had been a valuable friend. The present crisis was ~~an~~ alarming and ~~a~~ difficult ~~one~~, especially as it might lead to an exposure of everything connected with Rose Foster's deceased parents and the causes which had led to the father's suicide and the mother's sudden death. Moreover, the prince saw that in many other respects he was deeply in the power of Meagles; and he perceived at a glance that his ex-friend would sooner or later stand in the light of an extortioner demanding immense recompenses for former services rendered. These rewards, titles, honours, places, and pensions would be wrested by menaces instead of besought as boons, and thus, in every point of view, was it quite clear to the Prince of Wales that if he ever intended to make an attempt to crush Meagles altogether, now was the time.

Such were the reflections that passed, with rapid sweep, through the mind of the Prince of Wales during the couple of minutes that he paced with uneven and agitated steps the chamber where so many varied and stirring incidents had occurred. To a man so thoroughly heartless and capable of such black ingratitude as his Royal Highness, it was not very difficult to arrive at a decision.

But even while he was yet wavering how to act, the senior constable, who bore the euphonious name of Bax, accosted him, with many low bows, and gave every possible intimation, short of the utterance of words, that he craved permission to speak.

"Well, now, what is it?" demanded the prince, observing that the man was fidgeting around about him.

"Please your Royal Highness," said Mr. Bax, with another very low bow, "these fellers must be took into custody for assault and battery on your Royal Highness's person."

One of 'em I don't know nothink of," he continued, pointing toward Meagles; "but t'other," he added, indicating the working man, "is a very notorious character."

"Who is he, then?" asked the prince, impatiently.

"His name's James Melmoth, may it please your Royal Highness," responded Bax; "and he's one of the most seditious scoundrels in all England. He speaks at public meetings, tells the working classes they're oppressed, and denounces all kings and princes in a very savage style indeed, saving the presence of your Royal Highness."

"Ah! then the fellow must be crushed at once, or he will turn around upon me also," muttered the prince to himself. "Damnation seize upon this dilemma into which I have worked myself! Yes, there is no alternative; the seditious villain must be crushed, or he will expose the entire affair at the very next public meeting he attends. But what do you purpose to do?" he demanded aloud, and looking Mr. Bax full in the face.

"I know my dooty as well as any man breathing, and so does my two partners here," replied the constable. "Why, what is the facts of the case? We happen to be passing by Mrs. Brace's establishment, and we see your Royal Highness standing inside the shop making a few purchases, when in come two ruffins, and without no manner of provocation they insults your Royal Highness, and well knowing who your Royal Highness was, they pitches into your Royal Highness, and your Royal Highness —"

"Good, good!" ejaculated the prince. "I see that you understand how these little matters are managed. But are your companions to be equally well depended upon?"

"Quite, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Bax.

"Then let the two scoundrels be taken into custody and conveyed to the Home Office," said the prince, at the same time slipping his purse into the constable's hand. "And mind, Mr. Bax, as I shall not be there to give evidence, mind, I say," continued the heir apparent, fixing a look full of meaning upon the functionary, "mind that they are both seditious characters, both notorious rogues and disaffected persons, both dangerous to the state —"

"Ah! that they be," observed Bax, with a glance that showed how well he understood the part he was to play in

the matter. "And now, as they are both rekindling, I should advise your Royal Highness to withdraw."

"Your counsel is excellent," said the prince. "I cannot condescend to bandy words with such men, should they seek to address me and implore my pardon for this unprovoked outrage which they have perpetrated upon me."

Having thus spoken, and in this last sentence conveying to Mr. Bax a hint relative to the language in which his evidence was to be couched at the Home Office, the Prince of Wales quitted the chamber just at the moment when Tim Meagles and James Melmoth were being restored to complete consciousness.

Having hastily reassured Mrs. Brace respecting any fears which she might entertain of exposure, scandal, and disgrace, and having recommended her to keep Rose Foster a close prisoner for the present, his Royal Highness hurried back to Carlton House, which was only a couple of minutes' walk from the milliner's abode.

Immediately on reaching his private apartment, he summoned Germain to his presence, and addressed that faithful servitor in the following manner:

"You will proceed without an instant's delay to the lodgings of Mr. Meagles in Jermyn Street. I know that he is not at home at this moment, neither will he return for some time. But you will say that you are anxious to see him, and will therefore wait for him. When alone in his apartments you will open his desk, closets, cupboards, trunks, everything where letters or papers are likely to be kept; and all such letters and papers which you can find you will conceal about your person and bring to me. Never mind about breaking open locks, hesitate not to force doors or drawers, so long as you accomplish my commands. And if interrupted by anybody, declare boldly that Mr. Meagles is in a scrape, and that he requires his papers to help him out of it. If need be that you should say more than this, then state with equal effrontery that you are my servant, and that it is by my orders you are thus acting on behalf of my valued and esteemed friend, Mr. Meagles. Do you comprehend me?"

"Perfectly, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Germain; and, with a low bow, he retired to execute the commission thus entrusted to him.

The motive of the Prince of Wales in directing this step to be taken may be explained in a few words. It was not that he suspected for a moment that Meagles had purloined from him the papers proving his marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert, and the half of the Lightfoot certificate; but it was because he himself had on many occasions written notes to Meagles upon private affairs, which he was loth to have published to the world, and he thought it probable that Tim might have preserved those letters, in which case it was only prudent to regain possession of them.

We shall now follow Germain and ascertain the result of his mission.

On arriving at Mrs. Piggleberry's house in Jermyn Street, the French valet was informed (as indeed he had been led to expect) that Mr. Meagles was not at home. He accordingly declared that he wished to see him very particularly, and would walk in and await his return. The polite landlady, who knew that he was in the service of the prince, showed him up-stairs to Meagles's sitting apartment, where she of course left him.

The instant that he was alone, Germain began to inspect the place, and a writing-desk on a side-table immediately attracted his notice. It was locked; but before he broke it open, Germain took the precaution of trying all the keys that were upon a bunch in his own pocket, and one of them happened to fit the desk. A hasty glance over the papers which it contained enabled him to separate the letters and correspondence from the useless documents, such as tradesmen's bills, sporting memoranda, betting records, etc.; and having completed his research in respect to the desk, the valet proceeded to examine the cupboards and drawers in the adjoining bedroom. He, however, discovered no more papers, and pocketing those which were set aside to be taken away, he descended the stairs, observed to Wasp, whom he encountered in the hall, that he could not wait any longer, and returned to Carlton House.

The packet of documents which he had thus stolen from Meagles's lodgings was now delivered into the hands of the Prince of Wales, who was impelled by motives of curiosity to inspect them forthwith.

But how great was his surprise, how profound his amazement, when he discovered amongst them the very correspond-

ence which he had missed from his own desk some weeks previously, and which contained the proofs of his marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert!

"Then Meagles really was a traitor and a scoundrel," cried the prince aloud, as he assured himself that the papers were indeed the originals and no forged imitations. "He must have stolen them, the villain, stolen them from me, his benefactor and patron. But he will be punished at length, that is, if I know anything at all of English home secretaries and of Home Office proceedings. Ah! ah! Master Meagles, caught at last, eh?" exclaimed the heartless heir apparent, with a triumphant laugh. "Much as the Ministers dislike me as an individual, they have a profound veneration for royalty, and they will save this royalty from being in any way damaged, even though I am its representative who must now be vindicated. Yes, yes; there is no fear but that Meagles and his companion Melmoth will get the worst of it at the Home Office."

And again the treacherous, ungrateful prince chuckled joyously.

Then, resuming his examination of the papers, he discovered not only the half of the Lightfoot certificate which he had lost, but likewise the remaining moiety, and here was another cause for wonderment and satisfaction.

But there was still a packet of papers to inspect; and, to his increasing surprise, the heir apparent found that they were all in the handwriting of Mrs. Fitzherbert. And, ah! to whom were they addressed? To the Marquis de Bellois, a nobleman whom his Royal Highness knew to be at that moment in England, and whose name had been more than once mentioned to him by Tim Meagles.

Impelled by a devouring curiosity, and also animated by startling suspicions, the prince addressed himself to the task of perusing the numerous letters contained in this last mentioned packet. But, oh, why does his cheek blanch, why does his lip quiver, why does he become nervous and trembling, as if a strange excitement be growing upon him? Yes, and more acutely wrung are his feelings, now that the damning truth is carried to his soul, — the truth that Mrs. Fitzherbert was faithless to his bed and had been the paramour of another. And more, oh, more still remains behind; but it is speedily revealed, speedily developed by means of

those letters. For Mrs. Fitzherbert had become a mother during her foreign tour; yes, that woman whom he had married, his own wife, had born a child to the Marquis of Bellois.

Dashing down the papers, the Prince of Wales started from his seat and began to pace the room in an agitated manner.

It was true that his connection with Mrs. Fitzherbert was now completely broken off, true also that she had been ignominiously expelled, as it were, from Carlton House, true that he sought not to exercise any further control over her. But he was wounded to the quick at the idea that he had so long been her dupe, that the late partner of his bed had played the harlot in a foreign clime and with a foreign noble, and that he had for years cherished the belief that, whether with him or absent from him, she had remained faithful to her love and her vows.

Then there sprang up in the heart of the prince a bitter, burning hatred against the Marquis de Bellois, whom he looked upon as a successful rival, nay, whom he even regarded in the same light as a husband views the seducer of his wife. And upon this French refugee the Prince of Wales vowed to be avenged sooner or later, and by some means or another, he cared not how, but he hoped it would be soon.

The secret of Tim Meagles's success in compelling Mrs. Fitzherbert to leave Carlton House so abruptly was now fully explained. It was evident to the prince that he must have menaced that lady with exposure in respect to the amour whereof he possessed such damning proofs. Nor less did the possession of the Lightfoot certificate afford a complete clue to the tactics adopted by Meagles in negotiating with the king respecting the peerage and pension which had since been conferred, according to promise, upon Mr. Clarendon.

"Thank God," exclaimed the Prince of Wales, as he secured all the documents in his desk, "thank God that I thought of sending Germain to rifle my late friend's lodgings. The incident at Mrs. Brace's this afternoon, although at first so menacing, has turned out entirely to my advantage, since it led to my becoming possessed of these most important papers. And another desirable result will be presently

gained," he added, with a smile of haughty triumph, "for the villain Meagles is sure to be crushed beyond all possibility of redemption. Thank Heavens, the habeas corpus act is suspended just at this moment."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROCEEDINGS AT THE HOME OFFICE

THUS did the Prince of Wales congratulate himself upon the certainty of irretrievable ruin overtaking the man who, whatever fault he might have committed and whatever treachery he might have perpetrated in purloining papers from the heir apparent's desk, had nevertheless served his Royal Highness with such fidelity and zeal on innumerable occasions as to deserve at least some degree of leniency at his hands.

But while the prince was musing in that heartless style, an important investigation had already commenced at the Home Office.

In a lofty, spacious, and handsomely furnished apartment, three gentlemen were seated at a table. A clerk was employed in taking down the depositions at a desk near one of the windows; and midway between the table and the desk Meagles and Melmoth were standing. Two of the constables guarded the door, and Mr. Bax, the senior functionary, was under examination.

Of the three gentlemen at the table the one who occupied the chair at the head was the under-secretary of state for the Home Department, his superior in that office being engaged elsewhere at a Cabinet Council. On the right hand sat the attorney-general, and on the left the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

The names and addresses of Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth had been duly taken down; and Mr. Bax was now giving his evidence, or rather, his version of the affair involving the charge against the prisoners.

"Please, gentlemen," said the constable, "me and my two partners was walking along Pall Mall West quite pro-

miscuously and saying nothin' to nobody, when we see a rayther stout gentleman in the shop of Mrs. Brace, the highly respectable milliner. Well — ”

“ Merciful Heavens! ” exclaimed Meagles, who as well as his co-accused had hitherto been held speechless with amazement at the tremendous falsehood of the constable's preface, “ so far from the prince being in the shop — ”

“ Silence, prisoner! ” said the under-secretary, sternly; “ you will have an opportunity of cross-examining the witness presently. ”

“ Very good, sir, ” observed Meagles, bowing respectfully.

“ Don't answer me, sir, I tell you! ” vociferated the under-secretary, flying into a passion.

“ Your conduct is anything but like that of an innocent man, Mr. Meagles, ” said the chief magistrate of Bow Street, coldly and sternly.

“ The impression you have already made on my mind is most unfavourable to you, ” added the attorney-general, with a look full of hatred and spite at both the prisoners.

“ Gentlemen, I can assure you — ” began Meagles, more surprised than indignant at the observations just made, for he was wondering in what manner he could have offended so grievously and likewise so prejudicially to his own interests.

“ Silence, once for all! ” ejaculated the under-secretary.

“ Or we shall be compelled to have you removed and go on with the evidence in your absence, ” observed the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

Meagles bit his lip almost till it bled, for he could scarcely repress a violent outburst of indignation at the cowardly bullying to which he was being subjected; while James Melmoth found it equally difficult to restrain the fury that was boiling within him, and the effort to subdue which rent his very heart-strings with an excruciating anguish.

“ Go on, Bax, with your statement, ” said the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

“ Well, gentlemen, ” resumed the witness, “ I was informing your honours how me and my two partners was a-walkin' promiscuously along Pall Mall when we see a rayther stout gentleman in Mrs. Brace's shop. At fust his back was toward the door; but presently he turned around, and then we twigged — ”

"Recognized, my good friend," suggested the attorney-general, administering a verbal corrective in a tone whose blandness contrasted remarkably with that which he had adopted when speaking to Meagles.

"Thank'ee, sir, I meant to say recognized," continued Bax.

"And whom did you recognize?" asked the chief magistrate, also speaking in a mild voice and with agreeable manner.

"His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales," returned the constable. "He was talking to Mrs. Brace, which is a very respectable lady as always pays her rates and taxes without a murmur and reg'larly illuminates her house on all royal birthdays."

"Ah! a truly loyal subject," observed the under-secretary, with an approving glance at the attorney-general. "Please to continue your evidence, Mr. Bax."

"And let him remember he's on his oath," exclaimed Melmoth, sternly, for the working man was unable to subdue his feelings any longer.

"Silence, fellow!" ejaculated the under-secretary.

"These constant interruptions are intolerable," cried the chief magistrate.

"They show clearly enough that the prisoners are aware of the desperate condition in which they have placed themselves," said the attorney-general. "But such infamous attempts to intimidate the witness —"

"The attempts are made to intimidate us," exclaimed Melmoth, with an energetic gesticulation.

"How dare you threaten to strike the witness?" vociferated the under-secretary, starting from his seat.

"I did no such thing, I only waved my arm in the air," replied Melmoth, undaunted by the menacing mien assumed by the under-secretary. "But let the witness go on and finish his story."

"Proceed, Mr. Bax," said the chief magistrate.

"Well, your honours," resumed the constable, "as his Royal Highness was giving his orders to Mrs. Brace, the two prisoners come along the street arm in arm and looking very disorderly. Me and my partners instantly twigged — I mean recognized them, and we at once knowed them to be two of the most desperate spouters at public meetings —"

"I never was at a public political meeting in my life," ejaculated Meagles.

"Oh, very well, you've committed yourself now," said the attorney-general, with a sardonic smile of triumph as he caught up the prisoner's remark. "You declare that you were never at a public political meeting, and the natural inference, of course, is that the meetings which you do attend are of a private character. Very good, Mr. Meagles; you stand confessed a member of secret societies. Take that down in the depositions, Mr. Prescott," added the attorney-general, speaking to the clerk.

"By Heaven! I will not submit to this diabolical misinterpretation!" ejaculated Meagles, his countenance becoming crimson with wrath, and every vein on his forehead swelling almost to bursting.

"It is scandalous, perfectly fiendlike," exclaimed Melmoth. "No Russian tyranny or Spanish inquisitorial despotism was ever worse."

"Silence, both of you, or you shall be removed immediately," cried the under-secretary, who had posted himself upon the rug in front of the fire.

Tim Meagles threw a hasty look upon Melmoth, as much as to hint that they had better subdue their feelings as well as they could and let the witness proceed to the end, or else their removal from the room would deprive them of any little chance which they possessed of amending their own cause by shaking his testimony when the moment for cross-examining him should arrive. But that glance escaped not the lynx-eyed attorney-general, who instantaneously rendered it available to his own purposes.

"Did you observe those looks of intelligence which passed between the prisoners?" he demanded, addressing himself to the under-secretary and the chief magistrate; and, as they both nodded their heads affirmatively, the great legal functionary continued to exclaim, "Every step that is taken in this investigation yields fresh proofs of the dangerous characters of these men. Not only do they belong to secret societies, by their own unguarded admissions, but they actually carry their presumption so far as to communicate with each other by means of secret signs in our presence."

"'Tis false, false as hell!" ejaculated Melmoth, stamping his foot furiously upon the carpet.

"Do not let us be provoked into intemperate language, my good friend," said Meagles, earnestly. "I beseech you to be tranquil for the present."

Melmoth bit his lip and held his peace; but the agitated workings of his countenance plainly indicated how poignantly his soul was tortured by the effort which he was compelled to make to subdue a terrific explosion of those outraged feelings that sought a vent.

"Proceed, Mr. Bax," said the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

"I was observing, gentlemen," resumed the witness, "that while his Royal Highness was in Mrs. Brace's shop, a-talking to a young gal there — I mean to the milliner herself," he hastened to add, "them two prisoners come along the street in a disorderly manner, and looking just as if they was anxious to get up a row and collect a mob. Me and my partners, knowing them to be seditious characters and evil-disposed persons, kept a eye upon them; and, lo and behold! they walks straight into Mrs. Brace's shop, begins pulling the bonnets, the gowns, and the gals about, and takes liberties with the lady herself. The prince very nat'rally remonstrated with them; but scarcely had he begged them to take theirselves off, when one gives him a poult in the eye, and t'other a dab on the cheek, and there's no doubt in the world that his Royal Highness would have been killed stone dead in less than a minute if me and my partners hadn't rushed in and secured the rioters. A more unperwoked outrage I never vittessed in all my life."

"And did the prisoners know that it was his Royal Highness whom they were thus atrociously, brutally, and barbarously attacking?" inquired the attorney-general.

"To be sure they did," ejaculated Mr. Bax. "For they told him that they should like to serve his d——d old father in the same way."

"Did they utter any treasonable language?" demanded the attorney-general. "I mean, did they say anything which led you to believe that they aimed at the overthrow of the monarchical institutions of this country?"

"Oh, plenty of such sayings as them," returned Bax.

"I suppose that the prisoner Meagles alluded to republicanism and French affairs?" said the attorney-general, interrogatively.

"He talked about pitching the throne to the devil," responded Mr. Bax; "and he declared that the English people was fools not to imitate the French."

"And the prisoner Melmoth, did he give his assent to those observations?" asked the attorney-general.

"Oh, he was quite as bad as t'other, and said as how that all kings was tyrants," replied the constable.

"That will do, Mr. Bax," said the great law-officer. "You have given your evidence in a very straightforward, candid, and praiseworthy manner; and if the prisoners will allow me to offer them a suggestion, I should advise that they do not aggravate their guilt by any useless bravado, such as cross-examining the witness, but that they at once throw themselves on the mercy of the government."

"Mercy, indeed!" echoed Meagles, with a bitter tone and a disdainful manner. "No, sir, we are well aware that mercy exists not in the quarter where you would persuade us to look for it; but we will see whether there be anything like justice in this tribunal before which we now stand. I presume that the moment has now arrived for the cross-examination of this witness?"

"Yes, if you persist in a course so vitally prejudicial to your own interests," observed the attorney-general.

Meagles condescended not to vouchsafe any reply to the remark, but, turning toward Mr. Bax, he said, "Upon your oath, your solemn oath, have you told the truth?"

"That question cannot be allowed," interposed the attorney-general. "If Mr. Bax should admit that he has spoken falsely, he would be liable to a prosecution for perjury, and no witness can be allowed to criminate himself."

"Then I will ask him," exclaimed Meagles, "whether my fellow prisoner and myself did not seek him at his own house and require his assistance to rescue a young lady —"

"I really cannot permit this line of cross-examination," cried the attorney-general. "While pretending to ask a question, you are entering upon matter quite extraneous —"

"I will show you in a moment, sir," interrupted Meagles, "how the case of the young lady alluded to is intimately associated with the causes of my arrest and that of my fellow prisoner."

"No young lady has been specifically mentioned in the evidence," replied the attorney-general, doggedly, "and

therefore I cannot permit you to conjure up the phantom of such a young lady to suit your own particular purposes."

"But it was in consequence of the vile persecution of this young lady by the Prince of Wales," exclaimed Meagles, "that —"

"No persecution was mentioned by the witness Bax," said the law-officer. "Keep to his evidence, sir, and cross-question him thereupon."

"I will ask him, then," resumed Meagles, beginning to be much perplexed by the nature of the proceedings, "whether I did not in the first instance call upon him to accompany me to Mrs. Brace's house —"

"This certainly is most irrelevant," interposed the chief magistrate.

"Most decidedly," added the under-secretary. "It cannot be tolerated for a moment. It is against all rule —"

"And law," observed the chief magistrate.

"And precedent," exclaimed the attorney-general.

"Then I had better hold my peace," cried Meagles, in a tone of extreme bitterness; "for I see plainly enough that you are bent upon accomplishing our ruin. Melmoth, my good friend," he added, turning toward the working man, "I should advise you to abandon all hope of profiting by the cross-examination of that perjured scoundrel."

"Stand aside, Mr. Bax," exclaimed the attorney-general, unable to conceal his delight at having thus so easily got rid of any further opposition to the witness. "Come, let your companions be sworn."

The other two constables accordingly stood forward, and each, in his turn, deposed to the truth of the statement already made by Mr. Bax, the attorney-general putting to them such leading questions that they could not possibly mistake the answers which he was desirous of eliciting. Meagles and Melmoth both endeavoured to cross-examine them, but at every query they put, the attorney-general objected. One question was "irregular," another was "irrelevant," a third was entirely in opposition to "all precedent," and a fourth came within the style of cross-examination which some very learned judge who lived a few centuries back, in a very barbarian age, had thought proper to disallow and prohibit. The result of all the objections thus raised by the attorney-general was that the witnesses

were not permitted to respond to a single query calculated to shake their testimony or throw any real light upon the proceedings.

Mr. Prescott was now required to read over the depositions, which he did in a singsong, parish-clerk kind of a tone, doubtless to the great edification of the government officials, but to the unmitigated disgust of the prisoners, who had not as yet seen a glimpse of common sense or common justice throughout the entire proceeding.

The attorney-general and the chief magistrate then drew up a report to the effect that, whereas certain evil-disposed, wicked, and seditious persons, to wit, Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth, not having the fear of God before their eyes, and instigated by the devil, had conspired, did conspire, and were found conspiring against the throne and kingly authority of these realms; and, moreover, did compass, imagine, conceive, intend, project, devise, purpose, and purport to depose his most Gracious Majesty from the style, title, and dignity of sovereign of the British dominions; and whereas in order to accomplish, perform, and devise, and do what they had so wickedly compassed, imagined, conceived, intended, projected, purposed, and purported, they did in the first place assume disorderly and seditious looks and evil-intentioned mien in the public streets, to the great dismay, consternation, and alarm of certain of his Majesty's loving and dutiful subjects, thereby endangering the peace of these realms, and the peace of these realms being so endangered; and whereas the said Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth, while thus wickedly and seditiously menacing the state with civil war, did raise their arms against the person of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, thereby committing certain wicked and seditious acts of assault and battery on the sacred person of the heir apparent to the throne of these realms; and whereas it had been held that the raising of arms is the same as appearing in arms, and that therefore the said wicked and evil-disposed persons, Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth, were proven to have appeared in arms for certain treasonable and rebellious purposes against their sovereign lord the king; and whereas, upon their own admission, they did belong to certain secret, illegal, and unlawful societies, and that they had also communicated and conversed by means of certain secret signs

in the presence of certain of his Majesty's civil authorities engaged in examining into all these and other sundry and divers charges; and whereas it was established by evidence that the said Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth were notoriously disaffected, seditious, wickedly disposed, and riotous persons, not having the fear of God before their eyes, but instigated by the devil; and whereas the political guarantees commonly known as the habeas corpus act were at this time suspended in order that powers might be invested in the hands of his Majesty's government to repress sedition and maintain peace and order within these realms; therefore the undersigned, his Majesty's attorney-general and his Majesty's chief magistrate of the police, did thereby recommend that the aforesaid Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth should be summarily dealt with as disorderly characters and evil-disposed persons, etc.

This precious document, having been duly drawn up and signed, was attested by the under-secretary and forthwith despatched to the Foreign Office where the Cabinet Council was sitting, in order that it might receive the signature of the secretary of state. Extreme promptitude characterized the whole proceedings; and when the document was returned in the space of ten minutes with the name of the home minister attached to it, the under-secretary at once directed that Meagles and Melmoth should be deported from the country without delay.

Vainly did the prisoners remonstrate against this tyrannical conduct, vainly did they demand to be heard in explanation of the transaction which had led to their arrest, and with equal fruitlessness did they request to be regularly committed for trial. Stern and inexorable negatives were the only response they could elicit; for the suspension of the habeas corpus act gave the government illimitable powers, and those powers were not likely to be used either leniently or humanely by the Ministers of that accursed tyrant, George III.

It was scarcely dusk in the evening of this memorable day when Tim Meagles and James Melmoth were thrust, handcuffed and carefully guarded, into a post-chaise which received them at the door of the Home Office. The only indulgence they could obtain was a promise that on their arrival at Woolwich, which was the immediate place of their

destination, they should be allowed to write a few lines to inform their relatives or friends "that they had been detected in treasonable designs against the sovereign, but that through the leniency of the paternal government they were permitted to repair without delay to North America, on condition that they never again return to their native land."

It would be difficult to describe the feelings of the two prisoners, as they found themselves being whirled rapidly along the road toward Woolwich, with chains upon their hands and a couple of armed peace-officers seated opposite to them in the vehicle.

Melmoth thought of his poor wife and children, and the cold shudder of despair passed through his entire frame every time he asked himself what was now to become of them. His wife loved him tenderly, and this sudden and unexpected separation might be the death of her, sickly as she was. At all events, even if she should survive the blow, she was already too weak in health and would become too deeply depressed in spirits to be enabled to toil for the maintenance of herself and children. Oh, these reflections were maddening, maddening; and more than once the strong man groaned aloud, during the rapid and brief journey to Woolwich, as the whole current of his blood appeared to rush suddenly to his heart and brain under the influence of those harrowing thoughts.

And Meagles, how did he bear his misfortune? Somewhat more calmly and philosophically, because he had no wife and children upon whose heads this calamity would rebound. The feelings which animated his breast were, moreover, of a bitter, burning hatred against the treacherous prince, rather than of a softer nature such as a husband and a father would have experienced. Nevertheless, he sighed, profoundly sighed, as he thought of poor Rose Foster; and tears stole down his cheeks as he wondered what now would become of the friendless, persecuted orphan.

To both Meagles and Melmoth the whole adventure wore at times the aspect of a dream. Its suddenness, the hurry of the incidents through which they had passed, the extraordinary change that a few hours had effected in their circumstances, and the tremendous engine of despotism which in "merry England" had been set in motion to

crush and annihilate them, — all seemed the details of a fantastic vision rather than the consecutive occurrences of stern reality.

At the Green Man at Blackheath the chaise halted for a few minutes; but the prisoners were not suffered to alight, nor did their custodians leave them. The postilion entered the tap belonging to the establishment, to procure some refreshments, and from that place came the voices of revellers, singing in chorus over their ale. The song was one about "British freedom," and it contained a verse vowing devotion to "our good King George." Alas! those thoughtless beings paused not to reflect that British liberty was a mere idle phantom, cheating the eye and deluding the heart, and that their king was one of the most cold-blooded tyrants that ever the Almighty sent upon the earth to be a scourge and a curse to erring mortals.

On went the chaise again, and at length the lights of Woolwich gleamed in the distance. Another quarter of an hour, and the vehicle rolled into the town, proceeding straight to the dockyard. There it stopped; the two prisoners were ordered to alight, and they were conducted into a little office, where, their manacles being removed, they were informed that they were at liberty to write the letters to their friends, according to the promise made to them at the Home Office. It was, however, represented to them by the senior peace-officer, to whose charge they had been entrusted, that the epistles must be couched in the sense already suggested, and that no comment upon the proceedings would be allowed. In a word, they were not to detail the facts according to the truth, but according to the version which had been recorded in the depositions; and the epistle which each prisoner wrote was therefore circumscribed to a few lines. That of Tim Meagles was addressed to Mrs. Pigglesberry, who he was well aware would lose no time in communicating its contents to Lady Lade; and that of James Melmoth was written to his poor wife.

When the letters were finished, the senior peace-officer took charge of them, with a promise that they should be delivered as early as possible in the morning; and the two prisoners, having been remanacled, were consigned to the care of a corporal and four soldiers, by whom they were marched down to the wharf.

The evening was very dark; neither moon nor star shone upon the face of heaven, and the obscurity was only broken by the lights gleaming in the windows of the arsenal and in the ships moored off the shore.

The soldiers conducted Meagles and the working man, both of whom were still handcuffed, down the slippery steps leading to the river; and at the bottom of the flight a boat was waiting, manned by six sailors under the command of a midshipman. The moment the soldiers and their two prisoners had entered the boat, it pulled off and rowed in the direction of a large ship which lay at a short distance, and through the port-holes of which lights were gleaming, so that it appeared as if a slightly curving row of lamps were suspended over the dark bosom of the river.

It was now by an effort of extraordinary skill, the most remarkable feature of which was the noiselessness wherewith it was accomplished, that James Melmoth succeeded in slipping off his manacles; but he held them in such a manner that their occasional clinking should prevent any suspicion of their removal.

In a few minutes the boat ran alongside the man-of-war which lay so still and stately upon the river, and the two captives were ordered to ascend the accommodation-ladder to the deck.

Meagles went first; but scarcely had he mounted half a dozen steps when a loud splash was heard, instantaneously followed by ejaculations of mingled terror and amazement from the soldiers and the sailors in the boat.

"Watch where he rises, and fire," exclaimed the corporal.

"He has dived, underneath the ship itself, perhaps," cried one of the private soldiers.

And then arose on board the man-of-war, echoing from stem to stern, the cry of "Some one overboard!" and the ship, a moment before so silent, was now a scene of agitation and excitement throughout.

All this was the work of a few instants; but Meagles had immediately comprehended the startling truth that his late companion in captivity had made a desperate effort and dared a tremendous risk in order to escape from his persecutors.

"God send him success!" muttered Tim, as a couple of sailors hurried him up the accommodation-ladder to the

deck, where he was given in charge to the officer of marines.

Meantime all the boats were lowered, and lanterns were hung over the ship's sides; and the marines on deck were prepared to fire at Melmoth should he, upon reappearing above the water, seem to have any chance of escaping from the galleys now rowing about in search of him. The tidings of his escape were communicated to the adjacent vessels and likewise to the shore; and that portion of the river became completely illuminated with the lanterns hung out by the shipping and along the wharves.

But all these measures were vain and useless. James Melmoth reappeared not to the view of those who were thus hunting him with bloodhound eagerness; and the impression soon became general that he must have perished in his desperate attempt.

Meagles shared in this belief, and great as his own afflictions were, he nevertheless had leisure and feeling enough to heave a sigh and drop a tear to the memory of the persecuted working man.

On the following morning, soon after sunrise, the *Diana* frigate weighed anchor; and, her white canvas filling with a strong and favourable wind, she stood gallantly down the river, bearing away, within the prisonage of her wooden walls, the once dashing, rollicking, intrepid, and adventure-loving Tim Meagles.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROYAL LOVER'S VICTIM

WE must now conduct our readers to an apartment in a little villa belonging to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and situated in the vicinity of Aylesbury.

This room to which we have just alluded was in a state of confusion, while some of its features indicated, alas! too plainly, the mental condition of that lovely creature who was its occupant. For there were bars to the windows and a strong iron grating over the fireplace; the door, which was chained outside, had a small trap to enable the physician, the nurse, or other attendants to satisfy themselves from time to time as to what the patient was doing within; and all the furniture was so massive as to defy even the maniac strength which some sudden inclination for mischief might prompt to havoc and destructiveness. The chairs were, however, all scattered pell-mell about, some overturned, one piled upon another; the carpet was rolled away from a portion of the floor; the drawers were all open, and various articles of female apparel were lying here and there.

But who is she, that lovely young woman, with her attire hanging negligently about her and her hair in disorder? Upon her head she wears a crown cut out of paper, and in her hand she carries a sceptre formed of the same material. There is a mingling of melancholy and wildness in her looks, a glitter of restlessness combined with an expression of touching pathos, evincing the sad truth that the flame of intellect burns steadily no longer, although the warmth of feeling be still the same.

Oh, whither does her imagination wander, like a troubled dove unable to find its ark? Alas! alas! for that unhappy girl whose mind has become a chimera exercising the baleful

influence of the Medusa-head to petrify all the wholesome thoughts that may chance to look in upon her soul!

For that same imagination which so lately proved the active element of her life's happiness and made her love the source of so many Eden-like joys, which decked fancy's temples with the fairest and brightest flowers, and revelled in the wildest and most romantic castle-building upon the enchanted ground of a foreshadowed future, this same imagination it is that now substitutes wretched phantoms for glowing poesy and the silliest dreams for the most exalted imagery. Yes, that ethereal spirit which was wont to soar like the flight of eagles above the clouds and penetrate even unto the realms of God's own glory, has now changed into the unwholesome vapour of a will-o'-the-wisp ignobly coursing along the surface of the quagmires of the world.

But, oh, what emotion of the hidden being brings that deep flush at one instant to her cheeks, her neck, and her bosom, and in another moment chases away the roseate glow and leaves her pale as a marble statue?

Now an indescribable dignity pervades that superb creature, as she seats herself upon a table, fancying it a throne, and places her feet upon a chair, believing it a royal footstool. For some minutes she remains still and queenlike, as if gazing upon a troop of courtiers kneeling around her. The delusion fills her with happiness, a flood of joy pours in unto her soul, her eyes light up magnificently, her countenance glows with the lustre and the richness of animation, her neck arches grandly, and her bosom swells with sensations of gratified ambition and proud triumph.

Suddenly a thought appears to strike her. 'Tis a momentary gleam of reason that darts athwart her brain, as the flashing levin breaks on a night of gloom; and, oh, how instantaneously the brightness passes away from her features and the cloud comes and settles thereon! For that gleam of intelligence, vivid as it is evanescent, dissipates her joyous illusion in a moment; and although her ideas relapse into chaos and confusion, yet does some sad and mournful impression, some strange and lurking misgiving, remain uppermost in her mind, and, in obedience thereto, she slowly takes off her crown and examines it, together with her sceptre. Intently, oh, how intently she gazes upon those objects; then her look becomes frightened, like that of an

innocent maiden struck by a first suspicion of her lover's treachery. Now her gaze is riveted upon the royal symbols again; and then bewilderment, terror, and awe gradually arise and mingle in her regard, like the look which we can fancy Eve to have sent forth from the gates of her Eden into the dimness of that unknown world upon whose face she was doomed to enter.

"Oh, is this the crown which I once hoped to wear, and is this the sceptre which I believed myself destined to wield?" exclaimed poor Octavia Clarendon, her lips at length expressing the cruel doubts which had sprung up in her soul. "No, no; it was to be a crown covered with jewels and glistening with gems, and a sceptre of gold that would not break so easily as this. But my beloved one will soon appear and bring me the crown and the sceptre which he promised. Oh, why does he not come immediately, for I have already waited long and patiently for my prince. Sometimes I think that I am a strange, wild, and fanciful girl, and all my ideas, though plain enough, nevertheless glitter in confusion like the spangles upon a robe that is shaken, or like the gleaming meteors in the north when the polar night puts forth its pomps and splendours. But, oh, this confusion is brilliantly beautiful, and amidst it all I behold my prince clad in royal garments and extending his arms toward me. Nevertheless," she continued, with a reflective air and in a tone of deeper pathos, "they will not let me hasten forward to meet him. Oh, why is this? Wherefore are we separated? Let me fly to his arms, or my soul will become a fountain evermore to gush with bitter tears. I will make the very air burn with my passionate sighs, if they keep me any longer from my prince."

Suddenly her entire manner changed: the melting beauty of her eyes gave place to a wild and terrible lustre, which shot forth like lightning-shafts; her countenance became colourless, ghastly, and distorted with anguish; and her bosom rose and fell with a violence and a rapidity evincing that a profound agitation raged within.

"Away, ye vile and despicable baubles!" she exclaimed, starting from her seat on the table, and dashing the paper crown and sceptre upon the floor. "Ye are the emblems of that deceit and cruelty and treachery which made me what I am. Oh, thou demon-hearted prince, hast thou no mercy,

no compassion, no sympathy for thy wronged and ruined Octavia? Wherefore hast thou blighted all the hopes of my youth? Why hast thou carried desolation and woe into the sanctuary of that heart which was filled with love for thee? O God! do thy thunders sleep? O Heaven! hast thou no lightnings left? Give me the wand of an enchantress and I will bring an universal deluge on the earth, that he may be swept away from the theatre of his crimes, yes, even though myself and all the world suffer annihilation at the same moment. Or let the mountains fall upon the nations, and crush the entire human species back, back into its pristine elements, so that he may perish miserably, miserably. Would that my words were daggers or that my looks were arrows, that they might go forth and pierce him to the heart. Revenge, revenge! shall I not be blessed with a full, complete, and crowning revenge for all my wrongs? Oh, let me think only of revenge! Let it be my reverie by day and my dream by night. Yes, I will cherish thee, thou fiendlike idea, as I once cherished the love that hath turned to this implacable hatred. I will cherish thee as I would nurture an innocent babe, were I a mother. I will cherish thee, oh, I will cherish thee as the religionist clings to his hope of salvation. Thou shalt wall me around and imprison me in one circle of sensations, thou shalt confine me to the narrow space of one idea, even as the Roman vestal, when seduced from her duty by the blandishments of love, was enclosed in a tomb of massive masonry. And yet, oh, my God, could I hurt that man whom I have adored and worshipped? Could I without emotion behold him dying or dead at my feet? No, no, never!"

And as the wretched girl thus shrieked wildly forth, a strong shudder passed through her frame, and she fell on her knees, joining her hands and clasping them convulsively at the same time.

"O ruined, heart-riven creature that I am!" she said, in a low voice fraught with a pathos ineffably touching and tenderly musical; "wherefore have my own feelings become scorpions to sting and scourges to lacerate my bruised and wounded soul? Will Heaven send no anodyne to soothe and heal? Oh, yes, for Heaven is kind and merciful and good, and blesses the parched flowers of the garden with its reviving dew. Hear, then, my prayer, O Providence!" she

exclaimed, raising her eyes with a holy earnestness, "and give me hope, give me comfort, give me happiness. Alas! alas! no solace comes; my brain reels, I suffer excruciating agonies in the hell of mine own thoughts, ghastly forms rise up before me, hideous shapes surround me. Adieu, adieu to all refuge against myself. Miserable, miserable girl that I am, the torrent of my ideas whirls me along in a flood of burning lava. Avaunt, ye harrowing recollections, begone, ye racking memories! Oh, that the past were a blank, that the present were unfelt, unknown, and that I might waken to the view of a smiling future's roseate dawn! But this may not be: I am lost, lost, beyond all redemption lost. Darkness closes in around me, a stupendous blackness, deeper than a funeral pall, is enveloping me. Earth and heaven are passing away; all is an abyss, into which I am precipitating. Powers of Heaven! will ye not stay my headlong flight? Oh, mercy! mercy! mercy!"

And covering her face with her hands, Octavia became convulsed with grief.

The ravings of her tongue ceased, but her soul was agitated like the ocean when the storm sweeps over it. Upon her knees did she still remain, strong spasms shooting through the limbs that were thus bent under her, and likewise through the arms which had been wont to clasp the neck of her royal seducer.

For some minutes did she thus endure the unspeakable anguish of thoughts and fancies and imaginings the nature of which no human conjecture can probe; but at length she slowly removed her hands from her countenance, and gradually raised herself up from her kneeling posture.

Then, sinking on a chair, she fell into a reverie so deep, so profound, that her physical as well as her moral nature was locked up in the thoughts which now absorbed her entire being. Motionless was she as the sculptured marble; not a finger moved, her bosom heaved not to the respiration, and her lips remained slightly apart as they were at the instant when this waking trance seized upon her. So passionless was the repose of her countenance, so fixed were the eyes, so still was every feature, that had it not been for the faint shade of the pink upon her cheeks, she would have cheated the gaze of a beholder into the belief that she was indeed a statue. From the depths of her soul, whatever thoughts

were agitating there, not a ripple reached the marble surface of her features; and if it were despair that thus retained her limbs and looks spellbound, it must have been that blank numbness which freezes every sense with the ice-chill of its utter hopelessness.

Upwards of an hour had passed during which Octavia Clarendon's mind and conduct underwent the various changes which we have endeavoured to describe in this chapter; and the reader has observed that in one mood she fancied herself a princess or a queen, in another, she saw the delusion of that belief; now she retained her love for her seducer, whose speedy arrival she expected, and then she gave way to sentiments of the most implacable hatred toward him; now she laboured under a fearful excitement, and then she fell into a reverie which held her motionless and still as death.

But during the hour which had thus passed away, the little trap or wicket in the door of the chamber had been gently lifted more than once; and an old woman, with a benevolent countenance, had looked anxiously but cautiously into the apartment. Then, having satisfied herself that Octavia was inflicting no injury upon her own person, the female withdrew, closing the wicket as gently as she had opened it.

The unfortunate young lady had remained upwards of twenty minutes in that deep, deep reverie which we have described above, and which was the most melancholy of all the varied phases wherein her mental aberration showed itself; twenty minutes of fathomless meditation, in which the soul and the body both looked inwardly and saw nothing outwardly.

It was about the expiration of this interval that the wicket was raised noiselessly again, and first the countenance of the old woman appeared, and then a young and lovely face, but on every lineament of which was expressed the deepest grief.

It was Pauline, who now beheld her sister for the first time since the terrible calamity had overtaken the victim of royal lust and perfidy.

The door was opened softly, and the younger Miss Clarendon entered the room alone, the door being immediately closed behind her.

Subduing by a tremendous effort the emotions which struggled to burst forth and which nearly choked her, Pauline laid her hand gently upon Octavia's shoulder. The unfortunate young lady awoke, as it were, with a sudden start from her profound reverie, and looking up into Pauline's countenance, she gazed long and intently on those features which she had kissed a thousand, thousand times, but which she remembered not now.

"Do you not recollect me, dearest, dearest Octavia?" asked Pauline, in a faint and scarcely audible tone; and she would have thrown herself upon her sister's neck and wept upon her bosom, had she not been emphatically enjoined to abstain from any demonstration of feeling calculated to excite the unfortunate girl.

"Yes, I recollect you," responded Octavia, after a long pause, during which she continued to gaze earnestly up into her sister's face: "you are a good genius who has often visited me in my dreams and kissed me when I was asleep. I am not afraid of you, as I am of other people who present themselves before me. You are the goddess of sweet flowers, and bright sunbeams, and everything joyous and glad; and I have already learned to love you, though this is the first time that I have seen you save in the visions of the night. But oh, wherefore do you weep, angel that you are?" cried Octavia, starting to her feet and pressing her sister's hand tenderly.

For the tears rained in torrents down Pauline's cheeks.

"Ah! now I perceive that it is not only mortals who weep," continued Octavia, in a tone of ineffable sadness, which made her sister's tears flow more thickly and fast, "but the good beings who live in heaven can likewise shed those pearly drops. But why do you weep now? Is it for me that you are mournful? Oh, weep on, then, weep on, sweet angel, for I am unhappy, very, very unhappy."

And, as she spoke, she dropped in a listless manner the hand of her sister, who, now utterly unable to resist the strong current of her emotions, sank upon a chair convulsed with grief.

"This is indeed most singular," said Octavia, in a musing tone, as her eyes were fixed compassionately upon her sister, that sister whom she did not recognize. "It was but last night I dreamed that you came to see me; and I fancied that

you were seized with a sudden and violent sorrow. For me thought that you sat down by my bedside, and took my hand, and began to talk to me upon subjects to which I paid little heed at first, but which gradually enticed my attention, and then enthralled it altogether. And it appeared to me that you told me many things which had happened when I was a little child and which I had since forgotten; and so pleasing, so touching, and so truthful was your language, that I imagined myself once more a child, chasing the butterfly through the green fields, with my straw hat hanging half-off my head, and my tiny feet scarcely pressing down the daisies and buttercups over which they glancingly sped. And then you spoke of home, yes, of home, a home that I once had, where kind faces smiled upon me, and kind hands pressed mine, and kind voices murmured God's blessing in my ear; and again were your words so truthful and so striking that I wept at those reminiscences which were thus conjured up. But I have no home now," added Octavia, heaving a profound sigh, "for this odious chamber cannot be called my home. No, no, 'tis a prison, a vile prison. Behold the bars at the windows, the iron grating over that fireplace, the padlocks to hold that grating fast, the door of the room always kept locked — Yes, 'tis a prison, a vile prison — Merciful God! 'tis not the home of my childhood — Oh, no, no!"

And having thus become suddenly excited by the unhappy turn which the current of her thoughts took all in a moment, Octavia clasped her hands convulsively, while her countenance, a few moments before completely unruffled, showed by its workings how poignant were the spasms that rent her heart.

"Octavia, Octavia, dearest Octavia!" exclaimed Pauline, unable to restrain her feelings any longer, but clasping her sister to her bosom. "Oh, do you not recognize me? Do you not know me, my beloved Octavia?"

"Ah! what name is that which you have mentioned?" cried the unhappy lady, tearing herself from Pauline's embrace, and speaking in a quick, agitated manner. "Me thinks that name is familiar to me — yes, I have heard it before — Oh, breathe it again, for it sounds softly and sweetly upon your lips."

And the elder sister gazed with a winning tenderness,

strangely and painfully commingled with vacancy, upon the countenance of the younger, whose heart was too full to allow her tongue to give utterance to a word.

"Oh, why will you not breathe that name once more?" asked the victim of royal treachery, her voice becoming more melting and touchingly plaintive than ever. "If I could do you a pleasure in so simple and easy a manner, I should not hesitate."

"Nor I, nor I, beloved Octavia," exclaimed Pauline, almost suffocated with the sobs that rent her breast; "only it drives me mad —"

"Mad!" ejaculated the elder sister, catching up the word which Pauline so unwittingly and so unfortunately let fall, "mad!" repeated Octavia, again becoming fearfully excited. "Oh, all the world are mad save myself. Ha! ha! I laugh merrily, merrily, when I think how absurd and ridiculous every living soul renders himself while endeavouring to look wise and sensible. There is an old gentleman with a white head who comes to see me sometimes; and he puts the silliest questions, makes the most preposterous remarks, and surveys me with the most laughable affectation of sympathy and compassion. Then he fancies himself a doctor and feels my pulse; and I humour him, poor old gentleman, as well as I can, because I know that he is mad and cannot be held responsible for his actions. At another time an old woman comes to see me, and she is mad also. But she does not know it, she does not even suspect it; and it is by endeavouring to appear sane that she renders herself ridiculous. Poor old thing! I have more than once laughed in her face, but I have been sorry for it afterward. All sadness, except that which arises from sin, is sacred; and therefore when I behold the melancholy looks of that gentleman who believes himself a doctor and of this woman who fancies herself a nurse, I ought to be serious. It is wrong of me to laugh, but I cannot always help it. And now, my dear friend, for I do not know your name," continued Octavia, approaching close up to Pauline and gazing upon her countenance with an expression of melancholy interest, though still commingled with that vacancy which denoted reason's aberration, "and now, my dear friend," she said, sinking her voice to a low and mysterious whisper, "pardon me if I tell you a truth that may not be altogether welcome,

but believe me, my dear friend, when I assure you that you yourself are as mad as any person in the whole world."

Thus speaking, Octavia turned lightly away; and picking up her paper crown, she proceeded to put it straight, singing the while a plaintive air in a low tone and musing manner.

Several minutes elapsed, during which the unhappy young lady appeared to forget that any one was present in the room; but all this time her sister, with feelings stretched to almost the extreme power of their tension, was standing by and contemplating her.

Presently the door opened gently, and the Duchess of Devonshire made her appearance.

Then Octavia, placing the crown upon her head and grasping the paper sceptre, seated herself on the table once more; and, after surveying her sister and the duchess with a mingled dignity and sternness for nearly a minute, she commanded them to quit her presence.

Pauline would have lingered to converse with Octavia again, to weep over her, to embrace her, and to endeavour to resuscitate fond memories in her mind; but Georgiana, well knowing how terrific were the paroxysms of excitement which seized upon the unfortunate young lady when contradicted or thwarted, dragged rather than led the distressed and weeping Pauline away from the apartment.

And Octavia was left to that solitude which her disordered imagination filled with a thousand phantasms; but though alone in that chamber, she was not friendless nor deserted in the villa, for there had Pauline now taken up her abode, by the consent of the really kind and generous-hearted Duchess of Devonshire.

CHAPTER X

A HUSBAND'S SELF - MARTYRDOM

FOUR or five days had elapsed since that tremendous scene at the mansion of the Earl of Desborough, which revealed to this nobleman and his wife the astounding fact that the criminal Ramsey was their guest, — a scene which led to the prompt departure of that treacherous individual, and threw the countess upon a sick-bed.

During that interval the earl had been unremitting in his attentions to Eleanor. Hour after hour did he pass by her bedside, and it was his hand that smoothed her pillow, administered her medicine, and bathed her feverish, throbbing brows.

At first her senses wandered and delirium seized upon her, and on those occasions the earl was careful to exclude the attendants from the room, for he naturally feared lest she should make revelations of a character destructive alike to his reputation and her own.

But it was not merely to keep a constant watch over her that the earl passed long days and held his vigils by the bedside of the countess. No, his motives were less selfish and far more estimable; for he loved that woman who had deceived him, he loved, adored, worshipped her.

And as he gradually beheld the danger passing away, convalescence approaching, and her thoughts settling down into their proper channels, his heart rejoiced and he experienced a happiness greater than any he had long known; for as he contemplated that countenance so eminently handsome, and swept with his looks that form so exquisitely symmetrical as it lay stretched on the couch, the snowy bedclothes affording indications of the contours of the shape and marking the superb length of limb and all the flowing

outlines, — as he thus contemplated the lovely Eleanor, we say, he felt that it would indeed be hard for her to die in the vigour of her years and the meridian of her heart's glowing passions.

Thus was it that this good nobleman, who lived only for the sake of that woman whom he adored, and whose happiness he would have gladly consummated by the sacrifice of his own, thus was it that he watched, day and night, by her bedside; and after her senses had returned, whenever she opened her eyes they encountered the melting, tender, and affectionate looks of that husband whom she had wronged so foully.

But so soon as Eleanor was enabled to collect her thoughts sufficiently to ponder upon everything which had occurred on that memorable day when the thunderbolt fell and burst at her feet, she began to ask herself, over and over again, whether she had betrayed the one dread secret to her husband. In fact, was he aware that Ramsey had been her paramour? Had she betrayed herself in the ineffable anguish of that moment when the canvas revealed to her the countenance of the criminal, or did the earl imagine then and still believe that her emotions at the time and her subsequent illness were merely the results of a sudden shock very naturally experienced under such painful circumstances?

The longer the countess reflected upon these matters, the more did she endeavour to persuade herself that her adultery was unsuspected by her husband. But in spite of the assiduousness and the pertinacity with which she endeavoured to reason her mind into this belief, there was a constant terror, an incessant misgiving lurking at the bottom of her soul, a feeling of uneasiness which she vainly, vainly sought to smother.

When she looked furtively at her husband at moments when he either fancied she was sleeping or when he himself had fallen into a reverie, the suspicion that she read the worst in his melancholy, pensive features would amount almost to a conviction in her mind; and then she thought she could understand all the forgiving generosity of his behaviour, all the noble-hearted devotion which made him endure everything for her sake.

But when they were alone together, a nervous trembling would come over her as she lay on the bed of sickness, and

at the first word which on those occasions fell from his lips she would start convulsively, as if some tremendous accusation were about to be made against her. At the same time the colour would come and go upon her cheeks with strange rapidity; and while at one moment her veins would appear to run with lightning, at another the blood would seem to freeze in its crimson channels.

The earl soon saw what was passing in her mind, and, animated by that compassion and that love which influenced all his conduct toward her, he was resolved to put a speedy end to a state of suspense, misgiving, and alarm, so torturing to her whom he adored despite of all she had done outrageous to his dignity as a husband and his feelings as a man.

It was on the fifth morning after the terrific explosion effected by the exhibition of George Woodfall's picture, and at about the hour of noon, that the Countess of Desborough was permitted by her physicians to rise from her couch for a little while.

Attired in an elegant *déshabillé*, the beauteous patrician lady was now reclining in an armchair placed at a short distance from the cheerful fire in her bedroom; and when the earl was readmitted to the chamber and the attendants had withdrawn, he availed himself of this opportunity to make revelations which were perhaps less anticipated by his wife than they are by any one of the two hundred thousand readers of this narrative.

"My dearest Eleanor," he said, "the moment has now arrived when it becomes necessary that we should have some serious conversation together."

"Ah! the dreaded moment!" murmured the countess, in a hurried and agitated undertone, bounding at the same time upon her chair as if she were suddenly galvanized.

"Do not be alarmed, Eleanor, dearest Eleanor," said the earl, noticing the convulsive movement, but not hearing the half-agonized, half-despairing expression. "Let me at once and without circumlocution inform you," he added, hastily, "that I know everything and that I pardon you."

"Everything!" murmured the countess, in a faint and almost dying tone, while her heart experienced such a sinking that it seemed as if the very tide of life itself were rapidly ebbing away.

"Yes, everything!" exclaimed the nobleman. "And now, my dearest, dearest Eleanor, if you will permit me thus to address you, I implore you to be calm and tranquil; for I solemnly and sacredly assure you that my forgiveness is as complete as your error has been great."

"Oh, yes, great, great indeed!" cried the countess, bursting into tears; "great, and unpardonable."

"No, not unpardonable," responded the earl, immediately. "Immense allowances are to be made for you, Eleanor, and I believe, I hope, I am too just not to admit the full scope of the extenuation."

"You cover me with shame and confusion, you make me loathe myself," exclaimed the unhappy lady, burning blushes now spreading over the cheeks which illness had left so pale. "Oh, you are an example of everything noble-minded, generous, lofty, and good, whereas I am the piteous representative of gross unhallowed passions and of that foul crime against which the Almighty has levelled a special injunction. Yes, yes, for I am an adulteress, Francis — and yet you can pardon me!"

With these words the countess threw herself at her husband's feet, clasped his knees, and looking up toward him in an appealing manner, she seemed to wait in torturing suspense until another word from his lips could confirm the forgiveness he had already promised.

"Rise, my Eleanor, rise," exclaimed the earl, hastening to lift her from her suppliant posture, and gently compelling her to resume her seat in the armchair. Then, stooping toward her, he pressed his lips for a moment to her polished brow, murmuring, "Yes, my Eleanor, I do indeed forgive thee. By that kiss I swear that thou art pardoned."

"Oh, never did so worthless a woman possess so noble-minded a husband," exclaimed the countess, devoured by shame, remorse, and an ineffable sense of self-loathing.

"Reproach not yourself, my Eleanor," said the earl; "but listen to all that I am about to tell you, and then, perhaps," he continued, in a trembling tone, "you will think me worthy of some little amount of love — unless, indeed," he added, his voice becoming scarcely audible, "you should despise me altogether."

"No, no, impossible, Francis," cried the Countess of Desborough. "But, oh, do you not recollect that scene

which occurred between us some few weeks ago, when you explained to me the hopes which animated you and the intentions that you cherished toward me on making me your wife — ”

“ Yes, yes, I recollect,” interrupted the nobleman. “ Oh, not a word that ever passed between you and me, Eleanor, has been forgotten. On that occasion to which you allude I told you that my hope was to gain your esteem and friendship, and my determination was to surround you with the most delicate attentions and unwearied assiduities — ”

“ And on that same occasion, Francis,” cried the countess, “ I acknowledged all that was great, generous, and noble in your conduct, and I assured you solemnly,” she added, casting down her eyes and blushing deeply, “ I assured you that I was then as pure and chaste a virgin as the infant babe. Yes, despite of the impassioned ardour of my nature, despite of those fervent longings which at times almost maddened me, I was still innocent in body, although perhaps impure in mind and in thoughts. And, oh, if since that period I have succumbed to temptation, opportunity, the irresistible force of circumstances, if I have yielded to all of these, and have lost my honour as well as your confidence and my own self-respect, oh, have pity upon me, have mercy, Francis, for I had struggled long and powerfully. Heaven knows how desperate were the efforts which for years I had made to repel temptation and guard mine innocence.”

“ I have pitied you, my Eleanor,” exclaimed the earl, “ and I have pardoned you. Merciful God! all that has happened I have well deserved and should have foreseen. ’Twas I who deserved to be blamed, not you. With the lamentable physical misfortune which rendered me unfit for marriage, well knowing, in fact, that ten thousand sources of misery would eventually be summed up in the terrible word impotency, I was a wretch to have induced a young, handsome, and impassioned woman to accompany me to the altar. Oh, as I have before explained the infernal mockery, ’twas binding to the side of a corpse a being in whose veins coursed the rich warm blood of a vigorous youth. But, O Eleanor, Eleanor! I have been tremendously punished, and I have likewise endeavoured to make you an atonement, even though your dishonour and my infamy were involved

therein. Now do you begin to understand any portion of my recent conduct?"

"Yes, yes, oh, yes," ejaculated the countess, a light suddenly breaking in upon her brain. "That night which the Prince of Wales passed in this house —"

"Oh, will you not despise me, Eleanor, I again ask?" cried the Earl of Desborough, his tone, his looks, and his manner indicating how deep was the excitement which was growing upon him. "But you shall first hear me, and then answer deliberately," he continued, without affording his wife time to respond to the query just put. "You remember that morning when the Duchess of Devonshire called upon you after her return from Scotland —"

"Great Heaven! a thought strikes me," interrupted the countess, an awful trembling seizing upon her entire frame and making every limb quiver as if with an intense chill. "Yes, that conversation which passed between the duchess and myself —"

"I overheard it all," said the nobleman, in a hoarse, thick tone.

"And you did not curse me! You did not invoke Heaven's vengeance upon my head!" shrieked forth the wretched Eleanor. "O God! how deeply, deeply I have wronged you, Francis, in so many, many different ways; and yet you have not spurned me from you, you have not thrust me forth as you would the snake which, having been warmed at your hearth, uprears its head to sting you."

"Have I not told you that I love you, that I adore you, Eleanor?" exclaimed the earl; "and are you not aware that there is no sacrifice which I am unprepared to make in order to ensure your happiness and win some slight portion of your esteem? But let us continue the topic upon which we were entering. You remember, then, all the particulars of that interview, Eleanor, which took place between yourself and the duchess?"

"To my shame, to my confusion, to my deep, deep sorrow, do I recollect every detail," said the unhappy patrician lady. "Led on by I know not what fatal current of reflections, impelled by some demon to open my heart upon a subject which should have remained sacred, I revealed the secret to her Grace of Devonshire —"

"Torture not yourself with poignant reproaches on that

head," interrupted the earl, with the mournful calmness of a martyr. "The past cannot be recalled, and it is useless even to deplore it. But on that occasion when yourself and the Duchess of Devonshire were indulging in the mutual outpourings of a secret confidence, the name of the Prince of Wales was mentioned by you both."

"Yes, oh, yes, I remember," ejaculated the countess, a new subject for shame now presenting itself to her mind, as the conversation alluded to by her husband flashed vividly to her recollection. "Oh, how can I bear thus to remain in your presence and have all my frailties and failings, my errors and my misdeeds, marshalled in dread array before my eyes!"

"It is not to torture you, Eleanor, that I am prolonging this discourse," said the earl, "but in order that we may have certain necessary explanations, and that my conduct may be appreciated by you in the proper light. Well, then, to resume the topic, painful though it be, I must remind you that the Duchess of Devonshire revealed to your ears the details of her own seduction by the prince; and from your lips then came the avowal that his Royal Highness had bestowed his smiles upon yourself and had sought to make you his victim. After the departure of the duchess, you came into the adjoining room, where you found me. As you are already aware, I had overheard everything. Oh, the mortal agony of that hour! Ages and ages of bitterness and woe and intense suffering were concentrated therein. For you had revealed to the ears of your friend my disgrace and your misfortune; and so deep, so crushing, so overwhelming was the humiliation I experienced that I stretched out my arms to the walls to give way and cover me with their ruins. You may conceive, then, how difficult it was for me to subdue my emotions and assume a tranquil mien when you entered the apartment. No angry feeling did I entertain toward yourself, Eleanor, but the harrowing sense of mortal agony which I endured arose from the one grand, eternal conviction that I had done you a foul, nay, the foulest wrong, by becoming your husband."

"And yet, Francis," said the countess, in a faint and trembling tone, "had you killed me when I thus appeared before you, after all you had overheard, I should have merited my fate."

"Holy God, no!" ejaculated the earl. "Not for worlds would I harm a single hair of your head. But let me continue, Eleanor," he said, in a less excited voice. "During the night which followed that terrible afternoon I never slept a wink. Like another Cain, did I wander to and fro, cursing my own fate, wishing that I was dead, and yet recoiling from the idea of suicide. I reflected upon the wrong I had done you, Eleanor, and I reflected also upon the means of repairing it. By the confession which you had made to the Duchess of Devonshire, I knew that you were pure and innocent, and I knew also that you were unhappy. Nature had endowed you with strong passions, and it was natural, therefore, that you should seek to appease them. They were devouring you, and your sense of rectitude was put to a trial as unjust as it was intolerable. My God! how I pitied you, how I hated myself! Yours was a fate beyond all commiseration, mine an iniquity beyond all cursing. I vowed that something should be done: either I would lay violent hands upon myself and thus leave you free to marry another in due time, or I would actually seal my own dishonour by throwing a lover, a seducer, a paramour in your way. Yes, these were the alternatives between which I had to choose."

"Oh, it covers me with shame, it weighs me down with confusion, to hear you thus unveil your feelings concerning me," said Eleanor, bending down her head to conceal the blushes that suffused her cheeks, those blushes that overspread even her neck and her bosom.

"Heaven alone knows what a night of torture and misery I passed," continued the nobleman. "Daylight brought me no relief, and I went forth to wander in the parks in a state of mind enviable only by a wretch about to be hanged. The mendicants who passed me, and on whom I bestowed my alms, little thought how cheerfully I would have exchanged conditions with them. In the afternoon I called upon a medical practitioner, a Mr. Thurston residing in May Fair. I promised him largely, but he could give me no hope. I went away distracted. On my return home again, I resolved upon self-destruction. But better feelings sprang up in my mind at the very instant when I was about to place the muzzle of a pistol in my mouth. Then I determined to live, but to adopt that other alternative."

"Oh, this is painful, most painful!" murmured Eleanor, with a faint, hysterical shriek. "It is agonizing, excruciating."

"And yet you must hear me to the end," said the earl, rather in a tone of entreaty than of command. "Well, I resolved, as I observed, upon that other alternative whereof I have already spoken; and remembering that the Prince of Wales had already sought to make you his victim, as you expressed yourself to the Duchess of Devonshire, I determined to afford him the opportunity which he desired. With a suitable excuse I waited upon him; and his Royal Highness condescended," said the earl, bitterly, "to accept a loan of twenty thousand pounds from the man whose wife he sought to seduce. It was to receive this sum that he honoured us with his presence in the evening; and I was charmed to see that you were ravishingly beautiful and that he was dazzled and captivated. Yes, I was charmed, I say, inasmuch as the success of my stratagem appeared inevitable. His Royal Highness was easily induced to pass the night at the mansion, and I felt confident that he would not fail to profit by the incident. You remember that in the drawing-room a dispute arose respecting some particular quotation. I volunteered to fetch the book which would set the question at rest. On my return to the apartment, I saw at a glance that a complete understanding was established between yourself and the prince, or, at least, I fancied that such was the case. You retired, and I was left alone once more with his Royal Highness. Then, oh, then, a mortal sickness came over me, and I shrank aghast from the thought of my own self-martyrdom. The prince observed the change which had come over me, but I easily persuaded him that it was a sudden indisposition. A few minutes elapsed in conversation, and we separated. He retired to the apartment prepared for him, and I hastened to my own chamber. Great Heaven! what a night did I pass again! I felt that I had crucified myself, that I had planted a crown of thorns upon my own brows, that I had affixed the stigmata upon my own person. Lava boiled in my veins, hell raged in my soul, demons scourged my writhing spirit with whips of scorpions and of flame. And yet, as God is my witness, Eleanor, I swear most solemnly that never once, no, not once, did a feeling of anger arise in my breast against thee. Though confident that thou wast locked in the arms of a lover —"

"You wrong me, Francis," ejaculated the countess, solemnly. "I swear as solemnly as thou hast sworn, that the prince —"

"I know what you would say, Eleanor, dear Eleanor," interrupted the earl: "you surrendered not yourself to the arms of the prince. Oh, this I saw on the following morning, this I understood beyond all possibility of doubt when his Royal Highness came forth from his chamber. And I, who was sinking down into the very dust with humiliation, I, the husband, who had sought to pander to my own dishonour, I, who had tutored myself to make every sacrifice of feeling for thy sake, I perceived at a glance that, instead of a night of love and pleasure, the prince had experienced a bitter mortification and a cruel disappointment. Then, oh, then, an indescribable pleasure seized upon me, and hurrying to my own chamber to conceal my joy, I wept like a child."

"Merciful Heaven! Francis, how acutely have you suffered for the sake of a worthless woman!" exclaimed Eleanor, throwing herself into her husband's arms and lavishing upon him the tenderest caresses. "Oh, how sublime has been your self-devotion, how glorious your self-martyrdom! Every mortal idea of generosity is outdone by this conduct of thine; and I shall know how to thank thee, my good, kind husband, ay, and likewise to demonstrate a lasting gratitude toward you. Unless, indeed," she cried, with hysterical abruptness, as a sudden thought struck her, — and at the same time she snatched herself away from his embrace, — "unless, indeed, you loathe, detest, and abhor me, because I saved my honour from a prince only to surrender it unto a criminal whose image is now as dreadful to contemplate as his presence was once necessary to my happiness."

And, falling back into her armchair, the countess fixed her frightened, anxious, deprecating looks upon the countenance of her husband.

"Have I not already declared that it is I who must ask your pardon over and over again?" cried the earl. "But I shall not seek your forgiveness for what may not be forgiven. No, I will endeavour to prove still further how anxious, how willing I am to make every reparation for the wrong I have done you, Eleanor, by becoming your husband."

Listen, then, grant me your patience once more. What I propose is that you should institute a suit against me for cruelty, ill-treatment, and a continued series of cowardly and brutal acts toward you."

"Heavens! what mean you?" demanded the countess, all the timid entreaty of her manner changing into ineffable amazement.

"I mean that you shall obtain a decree of divorce in the Ecclesiastical Court," responded the Earl of Desborough, "and the more important decree of separation will naturally follow in the House of Lords. To none of the legal steps thus taken shall I offer any opposition. Although the judicial proceedings will brand me as a cowardly ruffian who dared to ill-treat an amiable, excellent, and beautiful woman, yet shall I secretly rejoice at being thus placed under society's ban, inasmuch as my self-martyrdom will constitute your release from those matrimonial bonds that link you to the side of a corpse. You will be free to marry again —"

"Never!" ejaculated the Countess of Desborough, once more starting to her feet, and now drawing her fine form as proudly up as if she had not just risen from a sick-bed; "never!" she repeated, in a voice which went thrillingly, though musically sweet and clear, to the very soul of her husband. "No, Francis, I am not base enough to avail myself of so much generosity, nor could I consent to the consummation of the tremendous wrong which would result toward yourself. What! consent to have you branded as a coward that could ill-treat a woman, — you who would sooner die than lift your hand against me, you who have never even uttered a harsh word in my hearing, you who have sought to make every sacrifice that an unheard-of generosity could possibly prompt! Listen to me, Francis, listen to me," said Eleanor, her voice becoming thick with emotion and her manner growing as decided as that of a heroine of masculine mind. "I am not altogether insensible to the same feelings which have hitherto governed you only, and henceforth I will endeavour to share them with you. Not that I can ever hope to outvie you in generosity, Francis, because that is impossible; but I may at least render myself more worthy of all your love than I have previously been. Again, then, do I beseech you to listen, to hear me, while I invoke Heaven to witness that from this moment forth I will be a good,

obedient, dutiful, and loving wife, yes, a loving wife, Francis, and loving, too, with an affection which will burn all the more purely and brightly and warmly because it is kindled by a spark caught from the flame that animates your noble heart."

"Is this possible, Eleanor, oh, is this possible?" murmured the earl, faltering in speech and staggering in limbs beneath the sudden weight of an overwhelming happiness. "Ah! wherefore afford me a glimpse of so joyous a paradise, only to make me recoil the more despairingly into a deeper and blacker abyss of despair?"

"Oh, he will not believe me, he has lost all confidence in me!" exclaimed the countess, joining her hands with an air of poignant wretchedness.

"Believe you!" ejaculated the earl; "yes, oh, yes, I will believe you — Only, this sudden happiness is too much —"

And, pressing his hand to his brow, he staggered forward, reeled half-around, and sank nearly senseless upon a chair.

But ere he fell completely on the carpet, he was caught in the arms of his wife; and the unmistakable fervour with which she bestowed upon him the softest and tenderest caresses carried to his soul the ecstatic conviction that his own devoted love had indeed engendered a reciprocal sentiment at last in the bosom of the woman whom he adored.

In fact, no words can express the astonishing revolution which a short half-hour had wrought in the feelings of the beauteous countess toward her husband. His noble self-martyrdom for her sake, a self-martyrdom involving all the most delicate emotions and the loftiest sentiments that ever concrete in the heart of man, had inspired her with an admiration of his truly chivalrous character which amounted to a burning enthusiasm. Instead of appearing contemptible any longer in her eyes, he shone with a godlike lustre to her imagination. Instead of seeming an object to be despised and contemned, he had suddenly become invested with every attribute to command respect and ensure an exalted worship.

Chastened, purified, and elevated in every sense by the splendid example of a man who could make the largest sacrifices to the love which he cherished, and who would even have sealed his own dire unhappiness and stamped his own indelible dishonour for the purpose of ministering to his wife's desires, oh, who can wonder if Eleanor, herself so

intelligent, so sensitive, and so just, should become an altered being under such an influence and when moved by the impulse of so much gratitude, wonder, and admiration!

And to this frame of mind was the Countess of Desborough more easily brought by the fact that her love for Ramsey had been converted into the most ineffable hatred, abhorrence, and loathing; so that she experienced an indescribable relief, amounting to the ecstasy of a pleasure hitherto unknown, in turning away, as it were, from the memory of an amour so gross and so fraught with shame, to find herself the object of a passion so spiritually pure, so holy, and so æsthetic.

CHAPTER XI

LORD AND LADY HOLDERNESS

It was six o'clock in the evening, and the domestic had just placed the dessert upon the table in the dining-room at the dwelling of Lord Holderness in Cavendish Square.

His lordship was seated with his bride in that apartment, where the thick curtains were drawn over the windows and the soft lustre shed by the lamps was reflected in the decanters filled with yellow, rosy, and dark wines. Upon the board glowed the golden orange and the rich grape of Portugal; dried fruits, sweet cakes, and the various accessories to a dessert in winter-time likewise appeared in crystal dishes. The fire blazed cheerfully in the grate, and, to outward seeming, nought was wanting to complete the happiness of a man who had just been created a peer and who had taken a lovely young wife unto his bosom.

But he whom we so lately spoke of as Mr. Clarendon, and whom we are now to denominate by the haughty title of Lord Holderness, was not happy — no, far from it. He had obtained a wife who was ravishingly beautiful, it was true; but he had lost his daughters, who were more lovely still, and who might have proved his pride and comfort in his old age. The beautiful wife he had not wooed: she had forced herself upon him, and though but a few days had elapsed since they were united, he had already been taught to quail beneath her imperious temper and succumb ignominiously to her despotic will. Nor was Pauline there to soothe him; no, nor his Octavia to comfort him. He felt that he was childless, and the young wife whom he had placed at the head of his household made not his dwelling a happy home.

During the whole of dinner-time, and while the liveried footmen were present, but little conversation had passed

between the noble couple, and those remarks were of a cold and ceremonial nature. It was, however, evident, as the repast drew toward its termination, that Lady Holderness was becoming impatient of the restraint imposed by the presence of the domestics, and that she longed for the moment to arrive when their departure from the room would enable her to give utterance to the thoughts that were uppermost in her mind.

At length the wished-for instant came; and as soon as the dessert was placed upon the table, in the manner already described, Fernanda looked significantly at her husband, observing, "It is now necessary that we should discuss our plans and settle the course which we intend to pursue."

"So soon, ere the honeymoon be past?" ejaculated his lordship, evidently anxious to obtain a reprieve in respect to a subject which he viewed with terror and dismay.

"You have already demanded a postponement of this conference more than once, and I have acceded to your solicitation," said Fernanda. "But five days have now elapsed since we were united to each other, and that period," she observed, her bright scarlet lips curling with a momentary irony, "is quite sufficient for the honeymoon of a pair who wedded under such unusual auspices and for purposes of so purely a worldly nature."

"But, my dear Fernanda," exclaimed Lord Holderness, "the peerage which I coveted, and to which you were to help me, is gained — yes, gained without your assistance; and therefore I think the least you can do is to allow me to enjoy my honours in tranquillity. For you have profited by my good fortune in a manner most unexpected by yourself at the moment when you became my wife."

"If you continue to talk much longer in a style which argues a cowardly, grovelling, indolent disposition," exclaimed Fernanda, her eyes flashing fire and a deep pink hue suddenly rushing to her cheeks, "you will provoke me to upbraid you with no measured invective. But I propose that we argue the point calmly and deliberately."

"What point, my love?" demanded his lordship, in as meek, mild, and conciliatory a tone as he could possibly adopt in order to lull the gathering storm.

"The point whether you are to fulfil the objects for which we joined our hands and fortunes," responded Fernanda,

with a stern emphasis. "You craved a peerage, and I sought vengeance. At that time the removal of Arthur Eaton from this world would have placed you on the threshold of your desires, and would have gratified mine at once. Therefore did we make common cause against that young man, you from motives of ambition, and I from motives of revenge. Well, it is true that accident has suddenly befriended you in a somewhat remarkable manner, for you have acquired your peerage all in a moment —"

"And without perpetrating a crime," added Lord Holderness, emphatically.

"Ah! coward — But no, I will not taunt you yet," exclaimed Fernanda, at first starting from her seat as if to spring upon her husband with the fury of a tiger-cat, then instantaneously subduing her wrath and recovering all her external tranquillity and composure. "Yes, you have obtained your peerage," she continued, with a corresponding placidity of voice; "but I have not as yet succeeded in making the slightest advance toward the gratification of my vengeance."

"And will you not abandon it, Fernanda, dear Fernanda?" inquired the newly created peer, coaxingly.

"Now can I scarcely repress my feelings, so full of disgust and indignation and amazement am I at the question you have dared to put to me," cried the lady, the sea-shell pink on her damask cheeks suddenly deepening into the liveliest crimson, and the violet blue of her eyes darkening to the intensity of the stormiest black. "Renounce my vengeance? Never!" she exclaimed, in a tone of startling fierceness and electrifying wildness. "Although married to you, yet my soul cherishes a deeper hatred than ever toward him. Yes, and it was to enable me to consummate my vengeance against Arthur Eaton all the more easily that I became your wife."

"But how can I aid you in your schemes, Fernanda?" demanded Lord Holderness; "and what inducement have I to assist you, even if I possess the power? You do not suppose that I have any sentiment of vindictiveness to appease?"

"No, but you have ambition to minister unto and avarice to gratify," responded Fernanda, recovering her tranquillity alike of voice and manner.

"Ah! I begin to understand you," murmured Lord Hol-

derness, his wife's observation having touched in his heart the chord which she meant to reach; for if she had allowed five days to elapse ere she compelled him to enter upon the present topic, it was not through any consideration for himself, but merely that she might have leisure to probe every weakness, foible, and failing of his character.

"Listen attentively," resumed Fernanda, "and I shall prove to your satisfaction that the same result which gratifies my vengeance forwards likewise your interest. In a word, you are still deeply concerned in the necessity of removing Arthur Eaton from our path. For although with your peerage you have obtained a pension, yet is the latter so small that it will not serve to support your rank in a becoming manner. Already do I perceive, within the five days of my sojourn in this house, that we are living at the rate of ten thousand a year, instead of two. The carriage you set up the very morning after our marriage, the extra servants you engaged at the same time —"

"Yes, yes, your calculations are accurate, Fernanda," interrupted Lord Holderness. "But why foresee difficulties?"

"Because we must guard against them," promptly ejaculated her ladyship. "Let Arthur Eaton be once removed from your path, and you instantly become heir to the Marchmont estates, that peerage likewise merging in your own."

"Yes, Baron Holderness and Marchmont," said the nobleman, in a musing tone and with a gleam of satisfaction stealing over his countenance.

"Then, may not the possessor of two peerages boldly and confidently ask for an earldom?" cried the temptress, her beauteous features becoming radiant with the triumphant feeling which she assumed as her bright red lips poured the delicious poison into her husband's ears.

"O Fernanda!" exclaimed Lord Holderness; "you have inspired me with thoughts and aspirations which hurry me onward with a force that is irresistible, and you teach me to look upon the hideous aspect of crime as if I had been familiar with it all my life."

"Be brave, be courageous, be bold, my dear Walter," cried the false siren, rising from her seat and throwing her white arms around her husband's neck. "Come, behave in

a manner that will make me love you. When I first revealed my countenance to you the other day, you declared that I was adorable and that you could worship me. Well, give me a proof that you are really gratified by the possession of a young and handsome wife. You see that I am somewhat vain; but then, I know that I am really beautiful."

"And what proof of my affection do you require?" asked the nobleman, snatching a few kisses, and indulging in certain little toyings provoked by the splendidly white neck and remarkably low dress of his young wife.

"I demand," she said, seating herself upon his knee and placing her lips close to his ear, so that her cheek touched his own and her rich glossy tresses swept his shoulder, "I demand that you renounce not one tittle of the grand scheme which made us join our hands and our fortunes a few days ago; and I demand likewise that you place implicit confidence in me, and yield entirely to my guidance in everything which I shall propose respecting Arthur Eaton."

"I promise all you ask, Fernanda," murmured Lord Holderness, bewildered and overcome by mingled feelings of voluptuousness and ambition, and also by the fear of turning this delicious calm into a violent storm.

"You promise that you will not again oppose my views?" she said, inquiringly; "and you pledge yourself likewise to second them?"

"Yes, dear Fernanda," was the reply. "But will you really love me if I become thus docile and obedient toward you? Will you make me happy in this world, if I consent to dare eternal misery in the next?"

"Become all that I wish you to be," answered the lady, emphatically, "and I will adore you. But if you would indeed acquire my love, Walter, if you would have me devote myself fervidly and enthusiastically to you, and you only, you must hesitate at nothing that I may suggest."

"I will prove myself a very tiger of ferocity," murmured Lord Holderness, "if you only continue tender, affectionate, and kind as you are now."

And he strained his beautiful wife to his breast.

"The tenderness, the affection, and the kindness which I am now manifesting toward you," said Fernanda, in a soft, low tone, "are mere coolness and reserve in comparison

with that glowing enthusiasm which I shall testify toward you if you keep your promise and go hand in hand with me upon the path of crime. Yes, crime, my husband, crime," she repeated, the horrible word sounding strange when wafted to the ear by the witching melody of such a voice; "for crime shall cement our love, crime shall consolidate our affections. By plunging into the abyss of crime to the same depth, so that one shall be as deeply stained as the other, by ever keeping side by side in this enterprise of darkness and iniquity, so that one shall be neither before nor behind the other, by establishing, in a word, a perfect equality in our ominous career, we shall reciprocate the same regard, exchange the same amount of attachment, and have our hearts knit together by ties as firm on one side as on the other. And when we have learned to love each other in this manner and upon this system," continued Fernanda, her hideous sophistry flowing all the time in strains the most liquid and charming to the ear, as the pearly stream which the enemy has poisoned glides on into the heart of the besieged city, "then will you find that I am capable of adoring you with an adoration such as woman never bestowed on man before, that I will lavish upon you the tenderest caresses, even as I will surround you by the most delicate and unwearied attentions, and that, whether in the sentiment of love or in the voluptuousness of amorous enjoyment, I will so envelop your mind in blissful fascinations and so instil into your soul a sense of the most ravishing delights, that you shall deem such an amount of bliss cheaply purchased by even the darkest crimes."

"I am thine, wholly thine, Fernanda," murmured the nobleman, drinking in the poison of the honeyed words which his wife breathed in his ears, and now experiencing a species of intoxication from the effects of the warm, impassioned, and amorous looks which she tutored herself to cast upon him. "Wert thou a fiend in human shape," added Lord Holderness, enthusiastically, "I would say yea to everything thou mightest demand, even though it were to involve the surrender of my own soul."

"I see that I shall soon love you far more tenderly than ever I loved Arthur Eaton in the first flush of that glowing passion which was alike my strength and my weakness," said her ladyship, still retaining her seat upon her husband's

knee, and not only submitting to his toying, but likewise bestowing upon him frequent caresses in return.

"What, can you possibly love an old man like me so profoundly as you would have me believe?" asked Lord Holderness, an indistinct and very slight suspicion of his wife's sincerity flashing across his brain.

"Old!" she ejaculated, with an indignation so well assumed that it instantly destroyed his misgiving. "You are only a year or two past fifty, in your prime."

"And you are eighteen, Fernanda," observed the husband, now gazing with a deep but sensuous fondness upon the truly beautiful countenance of his wife.

"Oh, let us not enter upon these comparisons, my dear Walter," she exclaimed, her red lips and her white teeth shining in delicious contrast as her smile beamed radiantly upon the credulous man whom she was thus bending to her will and enthralling in her Circean meshes. "I must now give you a further insight into my own position and likewise into my plans. Know, then, my dear husband,— and you will start in dismay when I reveal the dread truth to your ears,— that I have committed a crime the penalty of which is death, and that there are three people in the world who are acquainted therewith."

"Merciful God! is this possible, Fernanda?" exclaimed her husband, shuddering all over and clasping her with convulsive violence in his arms.

"It is possible, and it is true," returned Lady Holderness. "And now a strange and wondrous mystery is about to be unfolded to you, Walter. For that malady which was silently, noiselessly, and unaccountably carrying Arthur Eaton to the tomb, and from which he has recovered as marvellously and even far more speedily, that malady, I say, was a slow poisoning, and I was the poisoner."

"You!" ejaculated the husband of this terrible woman.

"Yes, I! And now do you abhor me, Walter?" she demanded, in a tone so sweet and plaintive in its half-reproachfulness that it could only be compared to that fragrant zephyr of Orient climes which carries perfume to the sense and pestilence to the heart.

"Abhor you! Oh, no, no," exclaimed the infatuated Lord Holderness. "But continue, Fernanda, continue. We are to become criminal together, and our love is to equal the

crime which is to cement it. Then, continue, I say, and let me see how far you have gone already, so that I may hasten to emulate you. You observed that three persons were acquainted with your guilt in respect to Arthur Eaton?"

"Yes, three persons, all or any one of whom can therefore give up my life to the hangman at any moment," said Fernanda, with a coolness which was remarkable considering the nature of the communication she was making.

"And those three persons?" demanded her husband. "Who are they?"

"In the first place, there is Arthur Eaton himself," replied Fernanda. "Secondly, there is his valet, William Dudley; and thirdly, there is an old midwife named Lindley, who sold me the poison."

"And Arthur is aware that you thus sought his life?" exclaimed Lord Holderness, gazing upon Fernanda with mingled amazement and incredulity.

"He discovered the secret of his malady," she answered, in a tone that convinced her husband she was speaking the truth; "and by the same means that he found out the bane did he arrive at the antidote."

"Then how know you, Fernanda," exclaimed the nobleman, becoming suddenly and seriously alarmed, "how know you that he has not communicated the secret to others? Perhaps his father, Lord Marchmont, or your relatives, the Earl and Countess of Desborough, or Lord Montgomery, your cousin —"

"Tranquillize yourself on that head," interrupted Fernanda. "Not one of all those whom you have mentioned ever dreams of such a thing. Arthur Eaton has kept the secret, religiously and faithfully kept it; nay, more, he has pardoned William Dudley, and, as you are doubtless aware, still retains the man in his service."

"But such generosity as this —" began Lord Holderness.

"Is not sufficient to turn me from my purpose," remarked Fernanda, with an abruptness that overawed her husband in a moment and hushed the remonstrance that was still trembling upon his tongue. "You have now heard a secret which makes you aware of my real position. At the hands of Arthur Eaton I fear little, if anything at all, as matters stand at present; but his valet and the old woman might,

in a moment of inadvertency, or under the influence of a death-bed repentance, compromise me cruelly."

"Yes, I perceive that you are fully and completely in their power, my poor Fernanda," said Lord Holderness. "But what do you propose to do? Where is the remedy? Tell me, my beloved wife," he continued, still toying with her, still receiving her caresses in return, "tell me what you would suggest and how I can help you."

"It is serious, is it not?" observed Fernanda, inquiringly.

"Yes, far too serious not to require immediate attention," answered the infatuated noble. "But what do you propose in respect to that valet and the midwife?"

"To place a seal upon their lips for ever," rejoined her ladyship, solemnly.

"Ah!" ejaculated her husband, with a convulsive start. "And that seal —"

"The silence of death," added Fernanda, in a deep tone, as if her heart were a cavern and the voice came from the profundity thereof.

"Two murders!" said Lord Holderness, straining her convulsively to his breast. "Oh, Fernanda, Fernanda, I shall be blessed by thy love on earth, but through thee shall I be accursed hereafter."

"The present suffices for our thought, because we know that it exists," exclaimed the terrible young woman whom he had thus feelingly apostrophized; "but all that regards the future is vague, dim, uncertain, doubtful. We feel that we exist now, but we are not sure that we shall exist hereafter."

"O Fernanda! let us not add the crime of infidelity to the catalogue of guilt already perpetrated or about to be committed," cried the nobleman, now shuddering more violently than at first. "Ask me to peril my soul, and I will do it; but ask me not to deny that I have a soul thus to endanger."

"I will not again shock your prejudices, my dear husband," said Lady Holderness, with a slight accent of irony in her tone, soft and melting though her voice continued to be. "But you perceive, Walter, you perceive, I repeat, that to ensure my safety William Dudley and Mrs. Lindley must die."

"Yes, they must die," echoed the nobleman, pressing his

quivering lips to those cheeks that were now flushing with a feverish excitement.

"And in the death of one," said Fernanda, with a terrible light flashing in her eyes, "shall my vengeance begin against Arthur Eaton."

"I do not understand you," observed her husband. "That one to whom you allude —"

"Is William Dudley," she replied.

"And how will his death forward your design in respect to Eaton?" asked Lord Holderness.

"You shall see, Walter, you shall see," exclaimed Fernanda, her countenance becoming animated with the glow of a fierce and savage triumph. "We will drink some champagne together, and then, while our blood appears to run like lightning in our veins, I will unfold to you all my schemes, all my projects. And, oh, be assured, Walter, that my vengeance against Arthur Eaton shall be terrible, very terrible."

"When do you propose to take the first step toward the execution of all this?" inquired the nobleman.

"To-morrow, Walter, to-morrow," was the emphatic response.

"To-morrow! So soon?" he cried.

"Yes, to-morrow," rejoined Fernanda. "And now I shall surprise you by stating that the preliminary step is for us to call at Lord Marchmont's mansion in Hanover Square."

"But we know that his lordship is out of town at this moment," exclaimed the newly created peer; "and surely you do not wish to see his son, Arthur Eaton, the object of your bitter hatred and burning vengeance?"

"It is precisely because Lord Marchmont is absent from home," said Fernanda, "and because we shall be received by Arthur Eaton only, in his father's absence, — it is precisely for these reasons, I repeat, that we must call in Hanover Square to-morrow."

"And you intend to court this interview with him whom you regard as your mortal enemy?" exclaimed Lord Holderness, gazing upon his wife in mingled surprise and alarm. "Surely you do not contemplate a sudden and open act of violence against him?"

"Oh, do not imagine that I am so insane, so insensate,"

ejaculated Fernanda. "No, Walter, it is to make my peace with Arthur Eaton, to assure him of my forgiveness, to demand his pardon likewise, and to propose a sincere friendship for the future, — it is for all these purposes that I shall seek an interview with him to-morrow."

"Incomprehensible woman, what do you mean?" cried her husband, now utterly bewildered.

"I mean to render my vengeance the more certain and my own safety the more secure," was the deep-toned, subdued, and significant reply. "But now let us ring for champagne, my dear Walter," she cried, starting from his knees and resuming her seat; "and then, while the blood boils in our veins and excess of rapturous feelings enables us to contemplate crime with indifference, then, my lion-hearted Walter, will I, your tiger-cat, unfold my projects to your ears."

And Lord Holderness rang the bell for the exhilarating juice of Epernay; and then his eyes remained fixed with mingled delight and awe and terror upon that countenance whose ravishing beauty so strangely belied the aspect of the hidden soul, and he felt indeed that he had taken unto his bosom the most dangerous of serpents with the loveliest of skins.

CHAPTER XII

PHILANTHROPY — THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE PLOT

WHEN the Honourable Arthur Eaton manifested so remarkable a forbearance and so unparalleled a generosity toward William Dudley, whom he had detected in the very act of entering his room for a murderous purpose, he received from the penitent valet all the ill-gotten gains acquired by his subserviency to the criminal views of that tigress-woman Fernanda. On the occasion thus alluded to, Mr. Eaton had said to Dudley, "For the present I will take charge of those wages of iniquity; to-morrow I will tell you how they shall be employed. Retire to your own chamber, and fear not that I shall treat you with severity. No, it is my purpose to afford you every opportunity of making your peace with Heaven and becoming a useful member of society."

And what was the project which the philanthropic young gentleman had in view?

The case of his own repentant servant made him reflect upon the fact that many and many a sinner may be rescued from the paths of iniquity and redeemed from utter perdition if, instead of being hunted to desperation as an outcast of society, the genial influence of kind treatment and reformatory measures be adopted. For he felt that had he thrust William Dudley forth into the world, penniless, friendless, and characterless, the man must have perforce continued in the career of turpitude in order to obtain a meal and a bed. But, saved from this deplorable catastrophe, the chances were ninety-nine to one that he would thenceforth shun vice on account of the perils to which it leads, and embrace virtue for its own sake.

These reflections led the Honourable Arthur Eaton to a

more comprehensive consideration of the subject; and it struck him that if some means of reformation and redemption were applied to those unhappy wretches who, under the influence of pinching penury, have committed a first offence, a large proportion might be rescued from total ruin and reclaimed as honest members of society. For he asked himself how it was possible that the miserable youth or the desperate man, when sent adrift from a felons' gaol at the expiration of the term of imprisonment, could strike into the path of rectitude, turn at once to honest toil, and eat the bread of a meritorious industry. No, it was impossible. From the prison-gates do those beings come forth as destitute as when they committed the crime which sent them thither, clothed in rags, friendless, with the brand of Cain upon their brows, and compelled to feel all the anguish, misery, and pinching want inseparable to their outcast state, with the only alternative of thieving again to amend it. For the tyrannical government and the barbarian laws of this oppressed and wretched country have studied only how to punish, persecute, crush, scourge, and trample down, but never to save, reclaim, rescue, and raise up. There are ten thousand enactments by which a poor man may be hanged, transported, or imprisoned, but not one by which he may have the slightest chance of being reformed. So much for the blessings of ignorant aristocratic institutions.

From all this it appeared to Arthur Eaton that an establishment should be founded for the reception and temporary employment of those misdemeanants and felons whom the gaol is daily vomiting back again into that society which discards them as outcasts, an establishment where these friendless wretches might have immediate work given them, in return for which they would receive food and lodging until a sufficient period elapsed to test the sincerity of their penitence and place them in that frame of mind when some humane masters and employers might no longer hesitate to admit them on their land or in their workshops.

Acting upon these philanthropic views, the Honourable Arthur Eaton lost no time in purchasing a considerable piece of ground in the district which is now known as Pentonville, but which consisted of open fields at the period whereof we are writing; and on that tract did he speedily

set bricklayers and carpenters to work to raise a convenient and spacious building for the object which he had in contemplation. The "wages of crime" surrendered up by William Dudley went a considerable way toward the purchase of the land; and the valet was rejoiced when his master unfolded to him the use to which it was to be appropriated.

It was, moreover, resolved by Mr. Eaton that his penitent valet should be the superintendent of the institution when the edifice was completed.

As he did not wish either to obtrude his humane designs upon the public notice, or to incur the annoyance of having his scheme made the topic of endless, varied, and conflicting speculations before its efficacy had even been put to the test, he shrouded the real objects of the building in as much secrecy as possible; but he encouraged the operatives to use the utmost despatch in raising the structure, and thus, in the course of a few weeks, considerable progress had been made.

During that interval, Arthur Eaton had seldom missed a day in visiting the scene of his intended experiment; and very frequently of an evening, when the bricklayers had left off work, would he repair thither with William Dudley, and explain by the light of a lantern the objects of the various architectural arrangements which were thus rapidly developing their features as the several partitions rose within the circuit of the outer walls.

We have now given a rapid sketch of the aims and pursuits that occupied the Honourable Arthur Eaton during the period which had elapsed since that memorable night when he frustrated the murderous purpose that took William Dudley and Fernanda to his bedchamber.

But was Fernanda a stranger to these pursuits? No; far from it. In various disguises had she watched Eaton's movements from time to time; and more than once had she overheard, when concealed in the building, the explanations which he gave to William Dudley. The young gentleman's philanthropy she looked upon as the most sickly sentimentalism; and the valet's deep contrition she regarded as a maudlin sanctimoniousness. Toward the former she continued to entertain the fiercest hatred; toward the latter she had conceived the most profound disgust. She likewise considered Dudley as a traitor to her cause; and thus, while

nourishing schemes of diabolical vengeance against the master, she worked herself up to a pitch of rancorous excitement against the man.

Having placed upon record the preceding observations, we now resume the thread of our narrative, only requesting the reader to bear in mind the discourse which took place between Lord and Lady Holderness, as related in the preceding chapter.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the scene just alluded to that the newly created peer and his lovely bride alighted from their carriage at the door of Lord Marchmont's mansion in Hanover Square. We have already intimated that the noble owner of that sumptuous abode was temporarily absent on a visit to his country-seat; and of this fact Lord and Lady Holderness were not only aware, but they had availed themselves of the opportunity to carry out the nefarious and deeply ramified scheme which they now had in hand.

The Honourable Arthur Eaton was in the library when a footman entered to inform him that Lord and Lady Holderness were in the drawing-room. A glow of indescribable pleasure sprang up on the countenance of the young gentleman; for, judging others by his own generous disposition, it instantly struck him that Fernanda, having now married and settled in life, had repented of her former bitter hostility toward him and was desirous of making her peace.

To the drawing-room did he accordingly hasten, and the hope which he had so promptly entertained appeared to receive instantaneous and full confirmation from the air of frank cordiality and graceful affability with which Fernanda proffered him her hand. At the same time she darted upon him a look which seemed to say, "All is forgotten; let all be forgiven."

Eaton did not, of course, entertain the slightest idea that Lord Holderness was aware of the peculiar nature of the intimacy which had once subsisted between Fernanda and himself. He could not possibly suppose that the young lady had revealed to her husband the loss of her chastity previously to her marriage with him; nor did he behold in this union of his relative and his late mistress anything menacing toward himself, much less a league so formidable as that tremendous alliance of interests the most selfish and ven-

geance the most implacable which had in reality taken place.

It was therefore with the ease and respectful courtesy of a polished gentleman that Arthur Eaton congratulated Lady Holderness upon her marriage; and, turning toward her husband, he said, "I now have the pleasure of renewing to your lordship in words those felicitations which I have already conveyed in writing, upon your elevation to the peerage."

"I thank you, my dear Arthur," returned the nobleman, "for the letter which I received from you on the subject. I regret that your father is not at home, that I might have the opportunity of expressing my gratitude toward him for his recent kindness toward me. But in surrendering the pension which he condescended to allow me," continued Lord Holderness, his tone and manner acquiring a certain degree of hauteur, "that pension which he lately augmented so considerably, I am bound to testify in writing the deep sense that I entertain —"

"Surely, my dear Lord Holderness," interrupted Arthur, "this is not the most suitable time to converse upon matters of business."

"It is precisely that I may feel the true independence of sincere friendship," exclaimed the nobleman, "that I am anxious to throw off as much as possible, and likewise as soon as may be convenient, the weight of obligation which presses upon me. This relief will my mind experience so soon as I shall have written a few words to your father. Will you oblige me with writing-materials, Arthur?"

"If your lordship be determined to make this visit one of business as well as of friendship," said the young gentleman, "I cannot resist your purpose any further. I will therefore ring for my writing-desk —"

"Or stay," interrupted Lord Holderness. "I will not give you so much trouble, and, moreover, I would rather be alone for a few minutes while penning the letter. Allow me, therefore, to retire to the library. I know the way — There, do not think of accompanying me any farther."

And, gently pushing Arthur back, as the young gentleman courteously opened the door for him, Lord Holderness hurried from the apartment.

The moment the door closed behind him, the Honourable

Mr. Eaton accosted Fernanda; and in a voice of deep feeling, he said, "I thank you sincerely, thank you from the very bottom of my heart, for having signified by your presence here this afternoon that the past is forgotten and forgiven. The instant that I received intelligence of your marriage the other day, I longed to call, to pay my respects, to offer my congratulations, and to express a hope that henceforth we should be friends. But I was afraid —"

"You fancied that I was too vindictive ever to relent?" observed Fernanda, smiling so sweetly, so benignantly, and with such a bland expression of Christian feeling, that no human being, however intimately acquainted with her character, would have suspected for a moment that this heavenly wreathing of her lips was assumed as easily as she could put on any other appearance of hypocrisy and guile. "But since the past is forgiven," she continued, with a corresponding softness of tone, "let it also be forgotten. And now, Arthur, once more I proffer you my hand, the hand of sincere friendship."

"And once more I take it with gratitude and press it with cordial warmth," said the young gentleman, completely deceived by the words and manner and bearing of that lovely creature who carried the art of duplicity to a degree of such exquisite refinement.

The conversation between Arthur Eaton and Lady Holderness was then continued in a friendly strain, but upon general and indifferent topics, until the young gentleman suddenly observed, "By the bye, I have been grieved to hear that your noble relative, the Countess of Desborough, has suffered a very severe illness."

"She is convalescent now," said Fernanda.

"And the two Misses Clarendon are staying, I believe, at the beautiful little villa belonging to the Duchess of Devonshire, near Aylesbury?" observed Eaton, in an interrogative tone. "At least, so I learned a day or two ago."

"Yes, such is the case," responded Fernanda. "The duchess has taken a great fancy to them."

In this manner was the discourse continued for nearly twenty minutes; but in the meantime, how was Lord Holderness employed?

The reader has seen how artfully he contrived to get away from the presence of Mr. Eaton in the drawing-room, and

thence escape to the library; but he had in view some project of far greater importance than the mere desire to pen a letter to Lord Marchmont. For the sake of appearances, however, he did write an epistle to that nobleman in the sense to which he had alluded, and as soon as he had sealed and addressed it, he stole forth from the library.

No one was in the corridor, and, unobserved, he ascended the staircase. Fernanda had already tutored him so well that he experienced not the slightest difficulty in finding his way to Arthur Eaton's bedchamber, which he boldly entered.

He was prepared for all eventualities. If any one were in that room, his answer was ready: "he had been inspecting certain books in the library, the dust had soiled his hands, and he knew that he might take such a liberty as to seek his friend Mr. Eaton's apartment in order to wash them." Such was the apology which he had at the tip of his tongue, ready to offer in case of need; but the lie was not wanted. He encountered no one, either on his way to the chamber or in the room itself.

And in that room he did not remain a minute. What he did there, we need not at present disclose. Suffice it to say that he succeeded in accomplishing the purpose which he had in view, and, chuckling inwardly, he hastened back to the library. There he remained for a short time, in order to recover a mien of perfect composure; and at length he returned to the drawing-room, where he found his wife and Arthur Eaton conversing as agreeably as if there had never been any misunderstanding between them.

Lord Holderness gave the letter which he had written into the hands of the young gentleman, with a request that it should be presented to Lord Marchmont on the return of that nobleman; and Eaton promised not to neglect the matter, although he again expressed his regret that so much importance should have been attached to it on the occasion of a friendly visit.

The newly created peer and Fernanda then took a most cordial and affectionate leave of the Honourable Mr. Eaton, and, returning to their carriage, they were speedily whirled away to Hyde Park, in which fashionable resort they drove until five o'clock.

At this hour they were borne back to Cavendish Square

to dinner; and when they once more found themselves alone over the dessert, Fernanda lavished the most seductive caresses upon her husband, declaring that he had acquitted himself admirably that afternoon, and assuring him that he was already the object of a love which would speedily expand into the enthusiasm of a boundless worship.

The time passed rapidly away until nine, at which hour Fernanda said, "We must now depart upon the business which we have in hand for to-night."

"I am at your orders, dearest," cried Lord Holderness; and he rang the bell for his hat and cloak, while Fernanda hastened up-stairs to put on a shawl and a black hood such as ladies wore in those times when going out of an evening.

"Has your lordship ordered the carriage?" inquired the footman who answered the bell.

"No," was the response. "Her ladyship and myself are merely going to visit some friends a few doors off, and as the night is perfectly dry and very mild, it is not worth while to have the carriage for so short a distance."

At this moment Lady Holderness returned to the dining-room, wearing an ample shawl and a black silk hood, and, her husband giving her his arm, they sallied forth together.

But instead of repairing to the house of any friends in the neighbourhood, they hastened to the nearest hackney-coach stand; and, entering one of the vehicles, they ordered the driver to take them to the immediate vicinage of the archbishop's palace in Lambeth. Half an hour's ride brought them to the end of their journey, when they alighted, dismissed the coach, and repaired straight to Fore Street.

On reaching the house of Mrs. Lindley, Lady Holderness knocked gently, and the door was immediately opened by the midwife herself. She carried a candle in her hand, and the moment the light beamed on the well-known countenance of the fair patrician, as she partially threw back the hood which she wore, the old woman gave her a respectful welcome. Fernanda then entered the parlour, followed by her husband.

That room was unchanged in its aspect since Fernanda last saw it. The shutters were hermetically closed inside the casements, the white blinds were down, the dark stuff curtains were drawn. The massive walnut-wood furniture was as funereal as ever in its ebon darkness; the pictures,

in their black frames imparted the same unvaried gloom to the chamber. There, too, was the old dame's easy chair with its high back; a good sea-coal fire was blazing in the grate, its lambent flames playing up the wide-mouthed chimney; and, behold! there was another black cat, lazily opening its sparkling, glasslike green eyes, as it lay rolled up on the hearth-rug, yes, another cat to replace the one which Fernanda had poisoned.

The midwife courteously besought her visitors to be seated; then, depositing herself in the easy chair, she put on her great horn spectacles with the large round glasses, and her reptile-like eyes glanced inquiringly toward Lord Holderness.

"I see that you more than half-suspect that this is my husband, dear Mrs. Lindley," said Fernanda, observing the significant look; "and you are right. He is aware that I passed some time in your establishment, and the manner in which I have spoken of you has induced him to become your patron."

"Hush, my dear lady, not so loud!" whispered the midwife, placing her long, thin, parchment-like forefinger to her lip; "the very walls have ears, you know. But I congratulate your ladyship upon your marriage. I saw it mentioned in the newspaper, and I was pleased to think you were so comfortably settled."

"Let us proceed to business, madam, if you please," said Lord Holderness, "for her ladyship and myself have not much time to spare."

"To business, then, my lord," observed the midwife.

"I will explain the matter as concisely as possible," said Fernanda. "His lordship has a niece, a young, charming, and beautiful girl, nobly born, too, who is in a way to become a mother, and whose shame would redound upon a family with a reputation as yet unsullied. This unfortunate young creature, Mrs. Lindley, will be placed under your charge to-morrow night. But she must be introduced hither with the utmost secrecy."

"Yes, yes, I understand," whispered Mrs. Lindley. "You need scarcely give me such precise instructions upon that head. If your ladyship will name the hour at which I may expect my new patient to-morrow night, I shall be prepared to receive her."

"We will say at eleven o'clock punctually," answered Lady Holderness. "And now let me impress upon you that the utmost precaution is to be adopted. Your servants will be all in their own rooms, the lodgers in the house will all have retired to rest, and you alone, Mrs. Lindley, remember, I say, you alone will be sitting up to receive the unhappy young lady whom Lord Holderness will himself escort hither at the appointed hour."

"Everything your ladyship has suggested shall be strictly attended to," said Mrs. Lindley. "I suppose I am to understand that not even my confidential servant is to see the young lady during her sojourn in my house? I am to attend upon her myself?"

"Precisely so," answered Fernanda; "and your recompense shall be most liberal."

"Oh, that assurance is quite unnecessary from your ladyship," said the midwife. "But do you not inquire after your friend, Caroline Walters?" she asked, as Fernanda rose to depart.

"Ah! I had forgotten her," ejaculated Lady Holderness. "Is the poor girl still here?"

"Yes, but she will leave me very shortly, I believe," responded Mrs. Lindley. "Would your ladyship like to see her? She often and often speaks of you."

"Speaks of me!" repeated Fernanda. "How? Does she know who I am?"

"No, no, Heaven forbid!" cried Mrs. Lindley. "But hush! we are both talking too loud, and walls have ears! What I meant was that poor Caroline Walters speaks of the young lady, as she calls you, and she wonders whether you have entirely forgotten her."

"I will come and see her in a few days, when I pay a visit to my husband's unfortunate relative," observed Fernanda. "But in the meantime do not tell Caroline Walters that you have either seen or heard anything of me."

"Your ladyship is well aware that secrecy is the very life and soul of my profession," returned the old midwife, gently repulsing the huge black cat which at the moment leaped into her lap. "But will your ladyship take some refreshment?—or his lordship? A glass of wine and a biscuit—"

"Nothing, I thank you," said the nobleman, drawing his

cloak around him. "To-morrow night, as the clock strikes eleven, shall I be here, with my niece."

"To-morrow night, at eleven punctually," answered Mrs. Lindley.

Lord and Lady Holderness then took their departure.

CHAPTER XIII

CAROLINE WALTERS

NOT many minutes had elapsed after Fernanda and her husband had taken their leave of the midwife when a hackney-coach stopped at the door of the sinister-looking establishment, and Mrs. Brace alighted. She was received by Mrs. Lindley on the threshold, and instantly conducted to the warm parlour, where she did not refuse the refreshment which had already been offered to Lord and Lady Holder-ness.

"I have come to see you this evening, my dear friend," said the handsome and robust milliner, as she sipped her wine, "because I wished to have Caroline Walters disposed of in some manner or another before I bring Rachel Forrester over to you. Rachel must come in a few days, and I do not like the idea of any two of my girls getting together under such circumstances. They are apt to compare notes and then persuade each other that they have been ill-used."

"Precisely so," observed Mrs. Lindley, who was also indulging in some wine, which made her reptile eyes gleam with an ominous light through the large circular glasses. "This Caroline Walters, especially, is a girl of remarkable spirit and strange character."

"She who was so docile at first," cried Mrs. Brace, "and so thankful for everything that was done for her."

"Ah! but in such a place as this," observed Mrs. Lindley, bending forward and speaking with a mysterious air and low whisper, "young women are apt to get ruminating upon their position, and then they fancy that they have been wronged."

"Besides," added Mrs. Brace, "Caroline is half a Spaniard and may therefore be headstrong, vindictive, and unfor-

giving when once her spirit is aroused and her mind is bent upon a particular object. However, we must either coax her into compliance with my views, or else we must use coercion. Perhaps you will have the kindness to summon her?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Lindley; and she quitted the room.

In a few minutes she returned, accompanied by Caroline Walters.

The young girl — poor creature, she was but sixteen! — seemed pale and care-worn. The natural brunette richness of her complexion had yielded to a certain sallowness which indicated recent bodily suffering as well as a mind ill at ease; and there was a darkness, arising from the same causes, around her fine black eyes. Her raven hair, so luxuriant in quantity and so silky in quality, was thrust negligently behind her ears and fastened in a slovenly knot at the back of her head; and there was no longer in her dress that neatness and precision which had once distinguished her plain though becoming garb. In fact, the aspect of the young girl denoted that the sentiment of personal vanity had been absorbed in deeper and sterner emotions.

She did not hasten toward Mrs. Brace as if she still looked on the milliner as a benefactress; but with a sullen slowness of step and a sinister moodiness of manner she accosted her, saying, "I am glad you have come at last, madam, as I am wearied of being retained a prisoner here."

"A prisoner!" repeated Mrs. Lindley, holding up her hands with well-affected amazement; "what does the dear child mean? Surely the doors have not been barred against her? Surely she has never been locked up in her own room?"

"No," exclaimed Caroline, bitterly; "persecution and tyranny have not gone quite so far. But —"

"Hush, my dear child, hush!" said the midwife; "remember that the very walls have ears —"

"And it may be that they will one day find tongues," returned Caroline Walters, darting a glance of ominous and dire significance first upon Mrs. Lindley and then upon Mrs. Brace.

"What does the girl mean?" exclaimed the latter. "My dear Caroline," she continued, assuming a tone of conciliation and tenderness, "you are sadly altered toward me.

How have I offended you? What have I done to deserve this coldness, this ingratitude, this contempt?"

"What have you done, madam, to deserve any better feelings on my part?" demanded the young girl, now fixing her large black eyes upon the milliner's countenance as if her fiery looks could pierce that lady through and through. "Oh, madam," continued Miss Walters, in a tone thrillingly wild and bitterly reproachful, "I have learned to view things in a very different light from that in which I formerly beheld them. I now know who it was that literally sold me to the seducer, the base seducer, the nobly born villain who wooed me with guile, won my honour with treachery, and discarded me with a corresponding heartlessness. Yes, madam, I can see through it all, all; and I curse, ay, curse my own folly when I think that there was a time at which I believed that he really loved me. Well, what am I living for, I, who am so thoroughly unhappy, so irremediably miserable? Hope is gone, love is dead, every kind feeling is withered in my bosom; but another flame burns there, in the place of those lost sentiments, — a flame as terrible as if it were a tongue of fire snatched from the raging furnaces of hell."

"Almighty God! talk not in this horrible manner," cried Mrs. Brace, clasping her hands and growing pale with a real and unfeigned terror.

"Hush! I command you to be silent; the walls have ears," exclaimed Mrs. Lindley, gesticulating fiercely at Caroline Walters. "I implore, I beseech you to tranquillize yourself, my dear child," she added, in a more soothing tone. "You said you were a prisoner here, but I hope that you will withdraw that averment. Come, my dear love," she said, more coaxingly still, "do me the justice to admit —"

"I will do myself and you the justice to tell the truth," interrupted the young girl, in a cold, stern, and implacable voice. "That the doors have not been barred against me, I acknowledge; that I might have quitted your dwelling at any moment, Mrs. Lindley, I frankly confess. But though no actual violence has been perpetrated against my liberty, yet am I retained captive by a moral thralldom equally effective and not the less heartless. For the apparel in which I could alone go forth has been hidden, and the little money I possessed has been taken away. Penniless, and without bonnet or cloak, I could not cross the threshold of your

house, and you know it. To all intents and purposes, then, am I a prisoner here; and now I demand my release!"

"It was to consult with you, my dear Carry, upon your future plans and prospects," said Mrs. Brace, "that I came hither this evening. Pray do not excite yourself in this fearful manner. All that has been done was for your good, and the little restraint of which you complain —"

"Well, well, take your own view of the affair, madam," interrupted Caroline, sullenly; "only be quick and order Mrs. Lindley to give me my clothes and my money, and within a very few minutes I shall cease to be a charge to either of you any longer."

"Then you will compel me to speak severely," said the milliner, her cheeks now flushing with indignation. "The fact is, Caroline Walters, that I stand in the light of a parent toward you."

"Yes, a parent indeed!" observed the girl, with a deep, rancorous, malignant bitterness of tone and a ferocious wildness of look. "You prostituted me for gold —"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, rising from her seat, all quivering with rage.

"Hush! I command, I implore you!" murmured the midwife. "The very walls have ears —"

"Pardon me for speaking too loudly, my good friend," said Mrs. Brace; "but we shall close this interview in a moment. Miss Walters," she continued, turning toward the young girl, "you may vent your spite, your rage, your hatred upon me to your heart's content; but I have a duty to perform toward you, and that duty shall be accomplished. Ungrateful young woman that you are, you now endeavour to lay your own frailty and immodesty at my door; and you dare to impugn my character —"

"Character, forsooth!" exclaimed Caroline, with an irony alike of tone and manner, the keenness whereof made the brazen-faced woman wince visibly. "Oh, who dares speak of character now? Look at your establishment, madam, a nest of refined, elegant, and smooth-spoken prostitutes. Look at yourself, madam, a religious, churchgoing, almsgiving procuress."

"Wretch, I will tear your very eyes out!" screamed Mrs. Brace, her cheeks becoming purple and the veins on her forehead swelling as if they were ready to burst; for the

young girl's taunts, though words in seeming, were daggers in sooth.

"Silence! in the name of God, silence!" said Mrs. Lindley, in a tone of abject entreaty. "You will alarm the house, the neighbourhood —"

"No, no, we will put an end to this scene at once," interrupted Mrs. Brace. "Now, listen attentively, Miss Walters," she continued, assuming an imperious manner as a last effort to overawe the young girl whose conduct both alarmed and surprised her. "Do you know how stands the law with regard to us? I claim you as my apprentice, and I exact from you the obedience which you owe to one who stands in the light of a parent. Refuse me that obedience, and a magistrate will very speedily teach you what are my rights and your duties. Nay, more," added the milliner, becoming bolder as she perceived, or fancied she perceived, that her words were producing the desired effect upon Caroline Walters, "that same magistrate, if appealed to by me, will punish you for your past frailty, and there is no doubt that six weeks at Bridewell would curb your haughty and rebellious spirit into the proper compass. Now do we begin to understand each other?" demanded Mrs. Brace, in a tone of undisguised triumph, as she beheld her victim cowering beneath menaces which appeared feasible enough to an inexperienced mind.

The poor girl, for a moment crushed and overwhelmed as well by fear of the threatened terrors of the law as by the consciousness of her own unfriended, orphan, and lonely position in the world, turned her affrighted looks from the flushed and angry countenance of Mrs. Brace and bent them upon the midwife, as if imploring sympathy even in that quarter. But the old hag, who had resumed her easy chair the instant she saw that the milliner was triumphant, and who now sat in cold, stern dignity, like an abbess of a rigid order, this old hag, we say, fixed on the young girl those reptile-like eyes that now appeared to dilate through their circular glasses, and to gleam with a ghastly and malignant expression which froze the blood in her veins and made her heart feel like ice.

Completely fascinated, as it were, by that undefinable hideousness of attraction, that species of awful mesmeric influence which the old woman exercised at the moment

over the young girl, the latter had no power to withdraw her looks from this dread, unnatural gaze; and when, at the expiration of nearly a minute, the midwife arose slowly from her seat and with her cold, thin, sallow fingers grasped the fair, plump, warm hand of Caroline Walters, the young creature shuddered as if a snake were beginning to envelop her in its folds.

Still was she so spellbound that she gave not utterance to a word; and, under the influence of this tremendous fascination, she suffered the midwife to conduct her away from the room. Lamblike and unresistingly, but swayed by a cold and seemingly mortal terror, Caroline Walters was thus led up-stairs to her own chamber; but when the door was closed upon her and she heard the key grating in the lock, the unnatural spell was suddenly lifted from off her, her senses were unchained in a moment, her blood began to boil and her brain to ferment with all the vitality of a terrible indignation, and, dashing her hand violently against her forehead, she sank upon her knees by the side of her couch, murmuring, "Vengeance! vengeance!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE ORPHAN

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the incidents just related that Rose Foster was seated in the bedchamber where she was still a prisoner, at Mrs. Brace's house.

The poor girl was pale and care-worn, and her whole aspect showed that she was devoured by an intense grief, alternating only with intervals of blank despair.

Three days had passed since those memorable incidents which saw her at one moment at the mercy of the prince, then delivered by the sudden irruption of Meagles and Melmoth into the room, and then snatched away from their protection to be held a miserable captive once more, and reserved perhaps for that dishonour from which she could not now see a single avenue of escape, unless it were by the appalling path of suicide.

We shall not on this occasion undertake to describe at length the condition of mind to which bitter persecution and agonizing suspense had once more reduced this poor, innocent, harmless orphan girl. Suffice it to say that at the moment when we now again introduce our readers to her presence she was seated in the bedchamber of her captivity, alone with the crushing companionship of her own tremendous affliction.

Suddenly she was startled by hearing the key turn in the lock, and as she sprang from her seat the door opened. A crimson flush came and went upon her whole countenance as rapidly as the shadow of a fitting cloud passes over a field; and then, with cheeks once more colourless, but with a nervous agitation convulsing her from head to foot, she beheld the Prince of Wales enter the room. Not a cry

escaped her lips. She knew that no screaming to which she might give vent, however loud it were, would bring her succour in that accursed house of iniquity; and suddenly as a man is prompted by the instinct of self-defence to raise his arm to ward off the blow that threatens him, so speedily did the resolution spring up in the maiden's mind to make one last effort to escape from this atrocious persecution or perish in the attempt.

"My dearest Miss Foster," said the prince, closing the door, and keeping near it, "once again, for the last time, do I appear in your presence as a suitor. Believe me, oh, believe me, beautiful girl, when I declare that I hate and abhor myself for suffering so much cruelty to be practised toward you; but my love is stronger than my mercy, my passion dominates over my sense of justice. Now be reasonable, angelic girl, and look well at your own position. You cannot escape hence, and I am determined to make you mine. Why not surrender, then, with a good grace? Wherefore not accept the brilliant position which I offer you? Your resistance, sweet Rose, has already been strenuous, sincere, and protracted enough to satisfy the most delicate scruples of your virgin innocence; and now would you be acting wisely and prudently to make a merit of necessity. Oh, be cruel no longer, Rose, surrender at discretion, and do not compel me to have recourse to means which my soul abhors and which I should regret evermore."

The prince paused for a reply, but the young maiden uttered not a syllable. Nevertheless, her flashing eyes and her heaving bosom convinced him that his words had produced an effect upon her, but not that which he hoped and anticipated; for instead of melting into tears and succumbing to the force of circumstances against which she could no longer resist, her appearance showed that her mind was shocked and all her virtuous indignation provoked by the language against which she could not close her ears.

"You do not answer me, sweet girl, and you are angry," said the prince. "Oh, wherefore treat me thus? Why do you regard me as your bitterest enemy — I, who seek to become your best friend? Neither menaces nor entreaties appear to move you, and yet you are a woman, with a woman's heart."

"Oh, at length you compel me to answer you, vile man,"

exclaimed the orphan girl, her cheeks becoming crimson with indignation, and her eyes, usually so mild and benignant in expression, now suddenly flashing fire; "you compel me to answer you, I say, because you dare level your atrocious calumnies against the entire female sex. What, do you suppose that because in the ranks of aristocracy and fashion you have encountered titled ladies whose complaisance toward yourself has only been equalled by their contempt for the poor and humble, do you imagine that because duchesses, marchionesses, and countesses have been proud to win your smiles, even at the price of their virtue, do you fancy, I say, that because you have hitherto found female honour a thing of snow which the sunlight of royalty can melt in a moment, do you believe, on this account, that you have obtained a large experience of the mind and character of the entire sex? No, Prince of Wales, ten thousand times no! There is virtue in English women, there is honour in the hearts of British females. But not in the gilded saloon of fashion, nor in the mansions of the titled, nor in the gorgeous equipages which dash along, with beauty lounging so languishingly inside, no, not there must you look for bright specimens of female virtue. But you must seek them amongst those classes which you and your courtly sycophants despise, the middle and the working classes, I mean, and there only will you find the brows that are worthy to be adorned with the white roses emblematic of purity."

While giving utterance to this indignant defence on behalf of the majority of her sex, the beauty of the young maiden expanded into radiancy. Her forehead seemed to grow higher, and wider, and whiter, her eyes became lustrous in the extreme, her countenance glowed with a rich crimson hue, her bosom swelled and heaved as if the humble mortal were suddenly imbued with the Olympian pride of magnificent Juno, and her attitude gave indescribable dignity and grace to her entire form.

The prince gazed upon her with rapture; he heard the language that flowed from her lips, but marked only the music without heeding the sense, and as she stood before him, her modest loveliness rapidly appearing to expand into the glory of a goddess, his passion was excited to a pitch absolutely maddening. In his veins boiled the frenzied

blood, in his heart raged consuming fires. Had the sacrifice of all his royal prospects been demanded at the moment, or had Satan suddenly appeared to propose a compact involving eternal perdition, the prince would have yielded unhesitatingly, so long as the next moment should have assured him the possession of that lovely creature whose very innocence and resistance had rendered him all the more eager to revel in her charms.

"You talk of white roses, the emblems of purity," he exclaimed, the last words of her sublime remonstrance alone carrying their meaning into a mind that was all in a ferment with maddened desires and licentious longings. "Oh, be thou my blushing rose, tender and soft as thou art in name —"

And, darting toward her, he sought to clasp her in his arms.

But quick as this movement on his part was, more lightly by far did the maiden spring aside, and, rushing past him, she gained the door. In another moment the prince had turned, and his hand was upon her shoulder; but at the same instant she succeeded in opening the door, and, disengaging herself by a desperate effort from the grasp which he fixed upon her, she darted from the room.

Not a word, not a cry escaped her lips; desperation nerved her, and she knew that it was useless to raise an alarm.

Fleet as the fawn, she reached the head of the stairs, down which she was about to precipitate herself, when she beheld Mrs. Brace ascending them. An ejaculation burst from the milliner's tongue, for she instantly perceived, by the flying girl and the pursuing prince, how matters stood.

Springing back, sweeping like lightning past his Royal Highness, whose arms were extended to clutch her, the maiden gained the stairs leading to the top of the house. Three or four steps did she ascend at a time; the angle was turned, the next landing reached. Another flight was already more than half-ascended ere the prince, panting and puffing, had surmounted the former. But Rose runs for her honour, which is dearer to her than life.

The uppermost story is now gained, and the young lady enters the passage whence the attics open. But it forms no part of her plan to seek refuge in either of those rooms. As

well might she have remained in the one whence she has just succeeded in escaping.

A species of ladder, or rough ascent of steps, catches her eye. Joy! joy! her calculation was correct, the hope which she had entertained is fulfilled, the means of flight are there. Up that ladder she climbs, her little feet scarcely touching the steps, so glancingly do they move over them. She raises a trap-door, she enters the loft at the top of the house, — that loft whence she knows there is a means of escape provided, in case of fire.

And now the glance which she flings behind her shows her the prince just at the moment that he reaches the foot of the ladder. She lets the trap-door fall, she stoops and feels for a bolt, the loft being nearly dark; but there is no fastening, and, without wasting another instant, she sweeps her eyes along the interior of the sloping roof. Her glance catches a pensile streak of light gleaming through a crevice; it is a trap-door which opens on to the top of the dwelling.

But it is fastened, and she loses a few moments in drawing back the rusty bolt. At length it yields, and she climbs through that trap-door opening on to the roof, just at the moment that the prince enters the loft from the trap-door at the summit of the ladder.

The maiden pauses on the giddy height, and her looks are averted shudderingly from the yawning depth beneath, for a low parapet running along the top of the house alone stands between her feet and destruction. One moment's giddiness, one false step, and down, down would she fall into the paved yard which separates the back of the house in Pall Mall from the back of that in St. James's Square.

She paused, we say, for an instant as she stepped forth upon the roof, and almost immediately the prince appeared at the trap-door. Then Rose Foster stepped from the sloping roof on to the parapet, at the same instant that the prince sprang forth on the tilings.

"Rose, dearest Rose, in the name of God, come back," he cried, in a tone so changed by dread horror that it seemed like the voice of an old man of eighty.

"No, 'tis for you to go back," exclaimed the intrepid girl, every lineament of her ashy pale countenance expressing desperate resolution; "for if you advance another step,

I take Almighty God to witness that I will plunge headlong into the awful chasm below."

Scarcely were these terrible words uttered, when Mrs. Brace appeared at the trap-door; and an indescribable consternation seized upon her as she beheld the young maiden balancing herself upon the edge of that precipice, like a bird upon a twig of the tallest tree of the forest.

"My God! my God!" murmured the milliner, the dread horror of the first instant now changing into a vertigo which appeared to whirl her around and around

"Rose! Rose! I conjure you to return!" exclaimed the prince, who was likewise a prey to a hideous giddiness, produced by the sight of that charming young girl hovering on the very brink of destruction.

"Dare to touch me now, and I leap into the embrace of death!" cried Rose, her voice swelling into the pæan of a thrilling triumph, for she knew that her honour was now safe, even though its security were to be purchased by the sacrifice of her life.

And having spoken these animated words, she began to tread lightly and rapidly along the parapet, while the prince and Mrs. Brace followed her with their eyes, speechless horror entralling them, and neither daring to move hand nor foot, so utterly absorbed in the frightful spectacle were they. For it seemed as if the slightest breath or the contact of a feather would cause the maiden to lose her balance and hurl her down into the abyss that yawned below.

On she went, heeding them not, treading cautiously though lightly and rapidly. She might have stepped off the parapet back upon the roof, and thus pursued her way in comparative safety; but then the prince would start from the stupor of consternation and spring forward in pursuit. For the risk which she was daring was the talisman that held him thus spellbound; and therefore in her present appalling peril, in one sense, lay all her chance of safety in another.

Upwards of a minute was thus passed,—tremendous danger to herself and exquisite suspense to the vile prince and the infamous woman who beheld her. On she went, the slightest giddiness or the least tripping, and she would be lost. But no, Providence watched over her thus far; and she gained in safety the attic-window of an adjacent house.

She looked back; the prince was standing, paralyzed with horror, in the spot where she had last seen him; and Mrs. Brace was leaning half-out of the trap-door, in a similar state of mind. Pursuit, then, was not to be dreaded, and, thrusting open the window, Rose Foster entered the chamber to which it belonged.

No one was there, and the maiden passed on into a passage, whence she gained the staircase. This she descended, but not without some degree of alarm lest she should be taken for a thief and summarily treated as one ere she was allowed to offer a word of explanation. Confidence, however, gained upon her as she advanced without experiencing any molestation; and she had actually descended as far as the hall without meeting a soul, when she suddenly encountered an elderly woman, who proved to be a domestic in the service of the family occupying the house.

To this female did Rose, in a few hurried words, state enough to enlist her sympathy; and, with an observation to the effect that "she had for some time believed Mrs. Brace's establishment to be no better than it should be," the good woman hastily supplied the fugitive young girl with an old bonnet and shawl. Further than this her benevolence could not extend; but the gift was of infinite value to Rose at that moment and under such circumstances, and her gratitude was commensurate.

Another moment, and the orphan emerged forth into Pall Mall, the good-natured domestic stationing herself upon the threshold of the door to watch that no molestation was offered from Mrs. Brace's house adjoining.

All was quiet, and the young girl escaped in safety from the neighbourhood where she had suffered so much persecution and had endured such intense anguish.

Penniless, houseless, friendless, Rose Foster sped away. And now the supernal courage which had hitherto sustained her throughout the incidents of her escape underwent a painful reaction, and an overpowering sense of oppression seized upon her. Her brain began to whirl, the ground appeared to tremble and rock beneath her feet, and the powers of memory failed her. She felt as if she were going mad; nor could she steady her ideas sufficiently to resolve in her mind what course she should adopt. Though ignorant of the atrocious treatment which Meagles and Melmoth had

experienced at the hands of the government, she thought not of visiting the abode of either; but she hurried on, on, through the maze of the metropolis, intent only on placing as great a distance as possible between herself and the neighbourhood in which Mrs. Brace dwelt.

The sun went down, darkness fell upon the earth, and still the unfortunate girl wandered on like one demented. At length she gained the open fields, and she was glad. But now memory began to assert its empire and her thoughts gradually grew more settled. A consciousness of her true position came upon her with overwhelming force, and, while sinking with fatigue, she saw that she was houseless, penniless, foodless. Then did she recollect Meagles and Melmoth; and bitterly, bitterly did she blame herself for not repairing at once to either of them so soon as she escaped from the milliner's house.

It began to rain, and she looked through the darkness for some light that should guide her to a place of shelter. A gleam appeared at a short distance on the left, and thitherward she bent her steps. But the light speedily vanished, and on reaching the spot whence it had shone, she found herself close by a large building in process of erection.

Exhausted alike in mind and body, the unhappy girl dragged her weary limbs within the circuit of the walls; and, having discovered a nook which would at least protect her from the rain, she sank down there, enshrouded by total darkness.

CHAPTER XV

A NIGHT OF BLOOD

THE partially erected structure where the orphan had thus accidentally taken refuge was that very establishment which Arthur Eaton had founded; and at this identical moment he was inside the building, accompanied by William Dudley. The light which Rose Foster had seen was caused by the lantern carried by the valet as his master explained to him the purport of the architectural arrangements made since they last visited the premises in this manner; and the sudden disappearance of that light may be accounted for by the circumstance of the young gentleman and his attendant passing farther into the interior of the edifice.

Thus, while the Honourable Arthur Eaton was inspecting the progress of the works, in company with William Dudley, Rose Foster was seeking a shelter from the rain in a nook of that maze of half-finished buildings. Presently a profound sleep fell upon the maiden, for, as we have already observed, she was exhausted alike in mind and body.

But presently a wild cry, the appalling cry of "Murder!" ascended from the midst of the edifice, and Rose started up in horror. For a moment she fancied that she had been dreaming, but this idea was instantaneously dissipated by the loud lamentations which, coming from the interior of the building, smote her ear, and, seized with a mortal terror, the wretched girl fled precipitately.

It chanced that some labourers, returning home from their work, were passing by the place at that moment, and they were alarmed by the rending cry of "Murder," — a cry always dreadful, but doubly hideous when thrilling through the darkness. They stopped to listen, loud lamentations

followed, and by these were they assured that the former cry was neither a delusion on their part nor a mischievous jest on that of others.

Toward the building they accordingly hastened, and in a few moments they encountered some one flying as if on the wings of the wind. Under such suspicious circumstances, and with the cry of "Murder" still sounding in their ears, they laid violent hands on the fugitive. This was Rose Foster, and, with a thrilling scream and a desperate struggle, she endeavoured to tear herself from the grasp of the men, for so confused and bewildered was she by the abrupt manner in which she had been startled from her sleep, and so completely had terror gained possession of her, that in the wild chaos of her ideas it was no wonder if she fancied herself to be falling into the power of emissaries sent out by the prince or Mrs. Brace to capture her. But the resistance thus offered on her part only tended to confirm the suspicions of the labourers; and, despite of her piercing shrieks and her violent struggles, they dragged her into the interior of the buildings. Thence did the bitterest lamentations still emanate, and in about a minute the appearance of a light guided the men, with their screaming captive, to the spot where an appalling spectacle met their view.

Upon the ground lay William Dudley, weltering in his gore and quite dead, while in his breast still appeared the instrument wherewith the fatal blow had been struck by an assassin hand. And bending over the corpse, in a frantic state, was Arthur Eaton, clasping his hands wildly and rending the air with his passionate lamentations.

The lantern stood upon the ground, and lighted this scene of mingled horror and woe.

Roused by the rush of many feet and the dreadful shrieking of the half-maddened Rose Foster, Arthur Eaton turned toward the party; and the instant that he beheld a female dressed in black amidst the men, he sprang forward, exclaiming, "Behold the murderer!"

Then a shriek, louder, longer, more piercing, and more thrilling than all the rest, burst from the lips of Rose Foster, and she fainted in the arms of the men who held her in their grasp.

When she awoke to consciousness, she was in the infirmary of Clerkenwell Prison.

The scene changes to Fore Street, Lambeth.

Three hours had passed since the terrible tragedy enacted in the half-finished buildings at Pentonville, and it was now about a quarter-past eleven on this memorable night.

From a back room on an upper story of Mrs. Lindley's house a young female stole noiselessly forth, bearing a candle in her hand; and descending the stairs in breathless silence, she opened the door of the midwife's parlour.

But to her surprise and alarm, lights were burning within, and the great black cat, springing wildly forth, swept madly past the affrighted girl. Caroline Walters, for she it was, felt herself suddenly seized upon by a vague and unknown terror, and staggering against the door-post, she threw her startled looks around the room.

And, O horror! upon what appalling object did they settle?

Upon the carpet was stretched the old midwife, a ghastly corpse, and bathed in the blood that was still flowing from her neck.

For an instant Caroline Walters stood gazing, spell-bound and transfixed to the spot with dread horror; then, urged by the impulse of an indescribable terror, she turned to fly from the awful scene.

But on the stairs she encountered the two servants of the establishment; and, overcome by her horrified feelings, she gave vent to a loud scream and fainted in their arms.

When she regained her senses, she was in a hackney-coach and in the custody of two constables, who were conveying her to Horsemonger Lane Gaol on a charge of being the murderess of the midwife.

Why?
just
reminds a friendless orphan.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PRINCE'S DREAM

'TWAS deep midnight, and his Royal Highness, the heir apparent to the British throne, lay sleeping in his voluptuous couch.

Wax candles were burning upon the toilet table, a lamp stood near the bed, and a fire blazed cheerfully in the grate. Mellow was the lustre thus diffused through the gorgeously furnished apartment. The atmosphere was warm and perfumed, and the heavy drapery of the windows suffered not the slightest breath of the chill air without to penetrate into this chamber where royalty slept.

The prince was lying upon his back; his countenance was flushed, the veins on his forehead were swollen, and his slumber was uneasy. The lamplight played upon his agitated features; and as his lips were parted and his eyelids not quite closed, the gleaming of the clenched teeth and the appearance of a portion of the whites of his eyes gave him a ghastly aspect, as if, although the body were locked in repose, the soul within was awake and enduring the pangs of hell.

Had any one stood by his couch to contemplate him then, the effect would have been hideous and appalling on the mind of the observer; but no eye witnessed his uneasy slumbers, — none save that of God, from whose vigilance no mortal can escape.

The prince was dreaming. It appeared to him that a faint, gauzy mist rose slowly but steadily around his couch, until the entire apartment was filled with a vapour which gradually became more and more dense until it assumed an opaqueness and produced a stifling sensation as if he were enveloped in a thick cloud. Then a wail stole through the midnight air upon his ears, — a wail low, plaintive, and

ineffably mournful, as if the spirit of some departed mother had returned to earth to sing a lullaby over the cradle of the babe whom she had left behind her. With enthralled senses and with an interest painfully acute did the prince feel that his eyes were fixed upon a certain spot beyond all power of withdrawal; and there, in that spot, the cloud grew thicker and more dense, until a female shape appeared in the midst.

And now that shape passed slowly, slowly along before the prince, upon whose forehead a cold dew broke forth; and, with feelings wrought up to horror indescribable, did he recognize in the spectral form the once glorious beauty of one of the many victims of his lust. But as he still gazed with haggard eyes, another shape stood slowly forth from the dark cloud, and then another, and another, and another. And they each and all wore the semblance of lovely girls whom he had wooed and either seduced or ravished in his time, fair creatures who had gone down to the tomb with broken hearts and blighted affections, in shame and infamy.

But although these spectral shapes wore the semblance of those perished victims, yet was their beauty glacial with the colourless hue and the marble inanimation of death, and their forms were wrapped in the long, flowing garments of the grave.

Slowly, like a funereal procession, did the phantoms move around the couch, each circuit that they made rendering them more dreadful to look upon and likewise adding to their number.

And now some appeared to have babes in their arms, — spectral babes, as ghastly as the parents that clasped them to their marble bosoms, babes which were the fruit of those pleasures that the prince had purchased either by means of the most insidious perfidy or the most heartless violence. And those infants had all died either at their births or soon afterward, some sacrificed to the fatal compression adopted by their miserable mothers to conceal their shame, others murdered outright by suffocation, or even by a bloody violence, during the puerperal aberrations of those dishonoured beings who gave them birth.

Around the prince's couch did the grim and ghastly procession go, the shapes alike of mothers and babes gradually losing their natural lineaments and becoming horrible, horrible to gaze upon. And with their stony eyes and they

glare on the anguished prince, — those eyes which lost their vital colouring and became of a dull, light, leaden blue. Yes, mothers and babes alike glared thus on the prince; babes and mothers reproached him equally with their dead, lustreless orbs.

And though no word was said, yet were these corpselike eyes as eloquent as tongues. For they renewed in the harrowed memory of the prince all the details of his amours with those whose phantoms now reproached him with their stony looks; and he felt that he was a vile seducer in some instances and a cold-blooded ravisher in others. Then he was reminded that he was the father of those babes whose innocent lives had been extinguished almost as soon as the spark had gleamed; and the tremendous truth was held up before him in all its darkest, blackest colours, that he was the man who deserved to be stigmatized as the moral murderer, if not the actual assassin.

And now a wild cry, whose agonizing intonations evinced all the pangs endured by the conscience-stricken man, burst from his lips, a cry that mental torture wrung from him in his sleep, an expression of inward poignancy sent forth from the chaos of a soul whereon the spirit of remorse was moving.

Still he awoke not; despite of the lancinating anguish which rent his entire being, he slumbered on.

And more quickly began to circle the ghastly train of phantoms around his bed, and yet more hideous did they grow. The lamplight seemed to impart a living lustre to the wasted and faded lineaments, making death more appalling and the uprisen tenants of the grave more terrible to gaze upon.

But by degrees they lost the flowing garments that wrapped their forms, and their forms began to lose their flesh and their shapeliness therewith, until at last it was a troop of bleached and gleaming skeletons which now whirled and whirled around the bed of the princely sleeper.

Mothers and babes, on the skeletons went; babes and mothers, around and around the couch they glided on. With rattling bones the awful pageantry of death swept past and fast; and on the horror-stricken prince did the hideous shapes now seem to glare with eyeless sockets.

Yes, past and fast went the grim array, mothers and babes, babes and mothers, all with rattling bones.

And with the giddy dance of the skeleton throng whirled the brain of the maddened prince; torture and horror, crucifixion and anguish, delirium and despair, all seemed to enwrap him with the pains of hell. He tossed and heaved in his couch as if the voluptuous feather-bed were a huge snake coiled under him and the downy pillows were filled with scorpions. The perspiration poured off him in torrents; the veins of his forehead were swollen as if tensely strung blue cords lay intertwined and knotted just beneath the skin. Oh, the fierce, the wearing, the rending agony of these few minutes during which the gleaming train of skeletons circled about the royal bed.

And now, rapidly as a troop of dancers glide from the stage of a theatre when their part is over, did the hideous phantasmagoria disappear, skeleton after skeleton, and darkness, stupendous darkness, fell upon the scene.

But this darkness was only a portion of the prince's vision; for the wax lights, the lamp, and the fire still burned in the apartment. Therefore was it in his dream that he was entombed in so dense and pitchy a blackness; and while he fancied that his eyes were wide open and looking, as it were, into this deep, unfathomable gloom, vivid lightnings appeared to gleam at short intervals across the palpable darkness.

And then an awful voice, sonorous as if it were the rolling of a huge metal ball on an elastic bridge of brass, and solemn as if it came from a being whose abode was on the other side of the tomb, spoke in the following manner:

"O prince, has the world no warnings for thee, and has hell no terrors, that thou livest in defiance alike of God and man? From him to whom much is given, much is expected; but although earth hath no example of a being on whose head such benefits are heaped as on thine, still hast thou paid not the smallest mite into the treasury of the future. The white page allotted to thee in the book of the recording angel is a blank; whereas thy black page is covered with entries written in the hues of blood. A moral scourge art thou upon the earth; and already are thy crimes so great that if not another misdeed were added, still hast thou done enough to render thy name accursed until the end of time. The present generation, blinded by the dazzling rays of royalty, beholds not all the hideous blackness of thy character; but when, in

the course of a few short years, a more comprehensive liberalism shall have taught the nation to contemplate even its kings without prejudice, thou wilt be regarded as one of the blackest monsters of iniquity that ever disgraced the human species. And then a man will arise, bold enough to tear away the glossy veil which hides the deformities of the mighty by birth and the exalted in rank; and with an iron pen will he delineate all the evil traits of thy character, and mercilessly, though truthfully, depict all the misdeeds of thy life. For how manifold are thy enormities, and how poor the compensation offered by any opposite qualities! Selfish egotist that thou art, if thine eyes fall upon a charming flower blooming in its virgin innocence, 'tis but to blight it with thy lustful looks; if thou beholdest the sunny smiles of maiden artlessness, the hot breath of thine unholy passion comes upon her like a pestilence, and thy kisses leave pollution upon her lips as the snail voids its slime upon the leaf of the rose. Oh, for the hearts which thou hast broken! Oh, for the fervid affections which thou hast crushed for ever! The joy of thy conquests remains impressed upon thy mind while the victim moulders in that deep, silent tomb from whence there is no return. Thou triumphest in pleasures which are purchased by tears, lamentations, and premature deaths. Has some poor widow a lovely daughter whom she cherishes as a pet lamb, the lone woman's comfort must nevertheless be torn away from her to minister to the delights of the Prince of Wales. Has some father an only child, a blooming girl reminding him of the much-loved wife whom he has lost, this fair being, the old man's prop and support, must be snatched from his arms to suit the lascivious fantasies of the Prince of Wales. Oh, that such things should be, and scarcely excite a sentiment of remorse in the breast of him who causeth that widespread misery! But hear me, Prince of Wales, hear me, and tremble. Thou mayst pursue thine atrocious career in this life, thou mayst go through nature's garden plucking the fairest flowers, revelling in their perfume for a moment, and then tossing them aside to wither prematurely, and thou mayst continue to feast thine ears with the lamentations of ruined girls as if 'twere the most delicious music, but, as truly as there is a God above, a God who avenges as well as rewards, a God who is just as well as merciful, so surely shall con-

dign punishment await thee, O prince, in the world to come."

Such was the terrible address which rolled sonorously upon the ears of the heir apparent to the throne, as he lay locked in profound slumber; and then, as the unknown voice died away like departing thunder, a form blacker than the darkness appeared to stand out from the dense cloud surrounding the bed. And the prince fancied that he was gazing steadfastly upon the appalling phenomenon, and that the sable shape expanded into colossal proportions, until it became a mighty giant of hideous mien and terrible aspect.

Then again the voice rolled on the ears of the Prince of Wales, while the portentous phantom stretched out its ebon arm with menacing gesticulation.

"As yet thou hast traced thy path amidst the roses and fairest flowers of the earth," spoke the colossal being, "and thou hast wooed and courted pleasure in every shape. All that is loveliest of female beauty, all that is most luxurious of banqueting and festivity, all that is most sumptuous and splendid, most magnificent and gorgeous, in palaces and equipages, all, all hast thou made thine own. The four corners of the earth have been ransacked to bring together the means and materials for thy enjoyments. Wert thou a deity, thy pomp and thy state could not be exceeded. The millions toil in starvation to maintain thee in luxury; and it would seem as if those millions were created only to serve thee as slaves. Thine egotism has ranged over the whole world to find food for its aliment, and it remains insatiate still. Thy whole life is pleasure, thy whole existence luxury and love. Instead of there being a morrow, and a morrow, and a morrow for thee, each having new duties and bringing with it new cares, it seems as if thine entire existence were a mere continuous dream of soft indolence and voluptuous enjoyment. Such is thy career upon earth: but what will be thy doom hereafter? Oh, hideous and appalling contrast, a contrast beyond the conjecture of even the wildest and most horrified imagining. But thou hast feasted almost to satiety upon earthly pleasures, thou hast bathed to the very hair of thine head in the world's fount of bliss. Now, then, behold the doom which awaits thee after death."

Thus speaking, the colossal phantom encircled the prince with his huge sable arm, and his Royal Highness shrieked

piercingly in the midst of his slumber, for it seemed as if the cold and slimy contact of a tremendous snake were coming upon him. And he writhed and struggled with horrible convulsions in the imaginary grasp of the sable being; and then it appeared as if he were suddenly torn away from his couch and carried with appalling rapidity through an atmosphere as black as pitch and as dense as if it were one vast mass of soot. The numbness of an awful consternation now fell upon him; his tongue was paralyzed, so that he could not give vent to the scream which he wished to send forth as the expression of his agony, and through the black, palpable mist was he borne along, with hurricane speed, in the arms of the colossal phantom whose touch was like that of the slimy snake.

On, on through the stupendous soot-mist did the terrible being bear the prince, whose mind was filled with such dire horror that no mortal pen can find words to depict it, no human language afford terms to delineate its intensity. And by degrees the conviction dawned in unto the soul of this prince that he was in the embrace of another prince, more powerful than himself, the prince of the realms of darkness. At the same time that this reflection was working its way into his mind, he became aware that the shape of the colossal being was growing every instant more and more terrible; for although the headlong journey was continued through the black darkness which was felt with the same sensation as if the prince were being dragged through a pool of muddy water, yet was he enabled to trace all the outlines of the hideous being that held him in its infernal grasp. And he saw that instead of possessing legs and feet, the lower portion of the demon's body elongated in the form of a tremendous serpent, the vast mass of moving, loathsome, undulating blackness stretching away, away, to an incalculable distance, and at length being lost in the sootlike gloom. And as the fiend went rushing on with the speed of the hurricane, thousands of miles a minute, that monstrous tail rolled after him in a huge sable volume, as if the darkest thunder-cloud had gathered to form his train.

As the traveller through a night of pitchy obscurity catches a glimpse of lights glimmering in the distance, and beholds them increasing in brightness and in number as he draws nearer and nearer, until he distinguishes a vast city splen-

didly illuminated to celebrate some grand festive occasion, so did the Prince of Wales now begin to catch glimpses of far-off fires, which gradually developed their vastness and their lurid brilliancy to his view as the demon hurried him on toward that appalling destination. At length it appeared to the gaze of the horrified prince that he was approaching an illimitable tract of country all flooded with liquid flames, as the fields of the earth are inundated with water. Pestilential odours filled his nostrils with a sulphurous smell, and his throat grew parched, as if he had been swallowing ashes. A sense of consuming heat came rapidly upon him at the same time and he knew that he was being borne headlong on toward the endless burning lake of hell.

But suddenly the demon stopped short, and his sable arms placed the prince upon the summit of a pillar shooting up from some unfathomable depth below, a black marble pillar, on which his Royal Highness was left by the fiend to balance himself as well as he might, with the intuitive conviction that if he fell it would be to encounter destruction.

"Behold my kingdom!" exclaimed the prince of darkness, addressing the prince of the earth in that sonorous voice which now seemed to roll in undulating waves of sound throughout all space. "Upon the earth, immense is the line of demarcation which selfishness, egotism, and usurpation have traced between the high-born and the humble, the pampered few and the toiling many. But in my kingdom all are equal, and those distinctions disappear. In yon fiery lake, kings are suffering by the side of beggars, popes and bishops are writhing in the same pit with thieves and vagabonds. But if there be places in my realms where tortures are more exquisitely keen than elsewhere, if there be spots where the fire burns more intensely and serpents bite more sharply than in others, then do I reserve those scenes of excelling anguish for the souls of men who have occupied the highest places upon the earth. And now behold the wonders and the horrors of my kingdom."

With these words, the fiend waved his mighty arm, the sweeping effect of which was as if a strong wind suddenly agitated the sooty darkness that filled the air above the lake of fire; and it seemed to the prince as if he tottered and shook upon the summit of the colossal pinnacle where he

stood. But, recovering his balance just at the moment when he was about to give vent to a piercing shriek in the terror of falling, his Royal Highness suddenly beheld a strange and fearful spectacle.

For the lake of fire had risen in a moment so high up that it appeared as if he suddenly beheld, by the aid of a microscope, a scene which was far distant and confused before. And that flood of flaming lava was now swarming with life, as a drop of muddy water abounds in hideous things when inspected by the magnifying power of the instrument just mentioned.

Yes, there, in that vast range of fire which stretched illimitably northward and southward, eastward and westward, there, in the erubescant flood of living, liquid flames which glowed with a withering, stifling heat, there, in that boundless morass of ever burning levin, writhed the millions that people Satan's kingdom. Attired as they were when upon the earth, and retaining all their mortal lineaments, those immortal spirits of the damned tossed, heaved, and struggled with hideous convulsions amidst the tortures that enveloped them. But, oh, with what an awful shudder and with what a direful sickness at the heart did the Prince of Wales observe that amongst the doomed myriads were thousands and thousands wearing crowns, or mitres, or coronets, the emblems of their rank on earth. Yes, and how vast was the proportion of those whose forms were decked in rich garments, and who had gold chains suspended to their necks and glistening rings upon their fingers, the evidences of the luxury in which they had revelled during their lives. And then, indeed, did the horrified prince behold the fulfilment of the divine saying, that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Suddenly, while he was yet gazing upon the tremendous scene which stretched around and far away, that ocean of living fire which had no limit and which was bounded by no shore, the demon grasped him again with his sable hand, which was fashioned like the claw of a vulture; and, holding him forth at arm's length over the candescent flood which glowed and roared below, he exclaimed, in a loud voice, "Now shalt thou receive the reward due to thy crimes. Octavia Clarendon and all thine other victims shall be

avenged. Down, down into the depths of hell, and writhe there henceforth in everlasting torments."

As these last words rolled away from the demon's lips, sounding like awful thunderings throughout the realms of space, he relinquished his hold upon the prince, who instantaneously fell screaming and shrieking horribly through the jet-black air.

But just as it appeared to the wretched George that he was about to plunge headlong into the fiery lake, he awoke with so convulsive a start that the massive bedstead shook and quivered beneath him.

Then he lay motionless, utterly motionless, for a few minutes, striving to collect his scattered thoughts and settle his scared ideas in such a manner as to deduce from them the conviction that it was really all a dream.

But such a dream, — oh, the death-bed has known no anguish and the churchyard has seen no mental misery more poignant than the hell of excruciating feelings through which the Prince of Wales had passed in that tremendous vision. Still upon his corrugated brows stood the big drops of terror, still upon his countenance lingered the lines into which its hideous workings had convulsed it, and still was the sense of an awful consternation upon his brain and in his heart.

At length, when assured that there was nothing of reality in all that he had gone through, he raised himself in the bed, poured a quantity of brandy into a tumbler, and drank the burning alcohol at a draught. Then, closing his eyes, he endeavoured to settle himself to sleep again; and slumber was just weighing down his lids when a strange noise at the farther end of the spacious apartment fell upon his ears.

CHAPTER XVII

A STRANGE ADVENTURE

WITHOUT shifting his position in the bed, for he was so far overcome with drowsiness as to be unwilling to make any exertion, the Prince of Wales opened his eyes; but he was instantaneously recalled to complete consciousness, when he beheld the door of the secret staircase open slowly and cautiously. The idea that thieves had dared to break into Carlton House naturally flashed to his mind, and he thrust his hand toward the silken bell-cord which hung behind the curtains, when, to his amazement, he recognized the well-known form of the Amazon as she noiselessly glided into the room.

The first suspicion now yielded to the thought that Lady Lade, presuming upon the intimacy of a former occasion when she had disported with his Royal Highness in the bath, was intent upon some frolic; and, all idea of danger being instantaneously dissipated, the prince raised himself in his couch and surveyed the beauteous intruder with mingled feelings of curiosity and indignation.

Closing the door as gently as she had opened it, the Amazon, who was dressed in her male attire, approached the couch; and when she saw that the prince was awake and gazing upon her, she took off her hat, smoothed down her glossy hair, and bent upon him a smiling look fraught with a wanton sweetness that immediately disarmed him of his anger.

"Pardon me, your Royal Highness," she said, advancing close up to the bed, "pardon me for this unwarrantable liberty, this extraordinary intrusion, and deign to hear me while I give a brief explanation of my motive."

"Beauteous lady," exclaimed the prince, now feeling assured that the Amazon suspected not his treachery to-

ward Tim Meagles, although he was curious to learn what effect that individual's sudden disappearance had produced upon her, as well as the conjecture which she might have formed relative to the cause of it, "beauteous lady, if you come to me as the representative of the goddess of love and pleasure, you are truly welcome; for not only am I passionately enamoured of your charms, but I am likewise far from displeased at the sudden and unexpected presence of such agreeable company, inasmuch as I have only just awoke from a dream which troubled me not a little."

"My dear prince," said the Amazon, seating herself on the edge of the bed, and fixing upon him a look full of voluptuous languor, "I came but to consult you as a friend and concerning a friend. If, however, you wish to receive me in another and more tender capacity, I am your Royal Highness's obedient servant now, as I was a few weeks ago in yonder bathroom."

"You are looking gloriously handsome to-night, Letitia," said the prince; "and were I an anchorite — which, thank Heaven, I am not — you would assuredly tempt me to sin."

"But do permit me to give you some little explanation of this most extraordinary intrusion," exclaimed the Amazon, disengaging herself from the embrace in which the prince had caught her, though not without having permitted him to cull a few kisses from her moist red lips. "The fact is," she continued, reseating herself upon the bed, but a little farther off than before, "some days have elapsed since our mutual friend Meagles disappeared most strangely and unaccountably from his lodgings."

"Well, I have missed him too," ejaculated the prince, colouring deeply as he spoke; but as the Amazon was looking downward at the moment, he flattered himself that his confusion passed unperceived.

"At first," continued Lady Letitia, "I was not at all uneasy, because there might be a thousand reasons for his temporary absence from home. But when a couple of days passed and no tidings were received from him, I began to fancy that he must be in prison — arrested for debt, perhaps — and unwilling to let his friends know of his tribulation. I accordingly visited the Bench and the Fleet, and then made the round of every sponging-house in London —"

"With what result?" demanded the prince, as if sharing the Amazon's anxiety on behalf of the missing individual.

"With no success whatsoever," replied the lady; "and ever since I have been racking my brain to think what possibly can have become of him. At length—but not until to-night—it struck me that your Royal Highness had probably despatched him upon some secret and important mission; and knowing that he possessed a pass-key to the secret staircase of this apartment, I hastened to his lodgings, possessed myself of it, and made bold to pay the present visit. For when once a particular idea is in my head, I cannot rest until I have acted upon it; and my suspense was too great to permit me to curb it until the morning. Besides, I thought it probable that your Royal Highness might not have yet retired to rest, in which case I hoped and trusted to be pardoned for this intrusion."

"You are pardoned, my dear Letitia," said the prince. "Your forgiveness was sealed by those kisses which you allowed me to snatch just now, and which," he added, stretching his arms forward and again seizing her around the waist, "I mean to renew."

Thus speaking, the impassioned prince glued his lips to hers and whisperingly spoke honeyed words in her ear.

"But it was not for this tender dalliance that I came," she responded, in a low and melting tone, as she once more disengaged herself gently from his arms. "It was to obtain intelligence, if possible, concerning my absent friend—"

"And you have understood by what I have already said, my dearest Letitia," answered the prince, "that I am as ignorant and uneasy relative to Meagles as you are yourself."

"Yes, I feared as much by the observation you made just now," said the Amazon.

"Oh, let us hope that it is only some frolic on our friend's part," exclaimed the prince, "and that he will shortly reappear. Perhaps, my bewitching huntress, he is at this moment proving unfaithful to you—"

"Well, even that idea would be a consolation," interrupted the Amazon, appearing to take the suggestion quite seriously. "But if it should prove as your Royal Highness imagines, I can promise Master Meagles that he will be rated soundly by me. Here I have been undergoing all the imaginable and unimaginable tortures of the cruellest suspense—"

"Oh, let me kiss those lips which you pout so prettily," exclaimed the heir apparent, snatching her to his arms a third time. "And now, my charming huntress, let me implore you to lay aside this moping mood and converse gaily with me."

"It is impossible to resist you," said the Amazon, and all in a moment her countenance became radiant, as it was wont to be. "You say that you have had an evil dream?"

"Yes, and I am dull, in low spirits, altogether queer, Letitia. And thus I am really glad you have come to chat with me awhile."

"And I also, since such is the state of the case," responded the Amazon. "But this dream of yours — Ah! you start. Well, if the subject be an unpleasant one, I will not again allude to it."

"Excellent Letitia!" murmured the prince, pillowing his head upon her shoulder.

"There, close your eyes and sleep thus," said the Amazon; and with the hand of the arm that was thrown around his neck she pressed down his eyelids as if in a half-playful, half-soothing humour.

At the same instant, with the other hand, the Amazon took a small phial from the pocket of her breeches and poured a few drops of its dark-coloured contents into the tumbler whence the prince had already drunk the brandy, as just now stated.

"Ah, it is sweet to repose thus," murmured the prince.

"Sleep then," replied the Amazon. "But — Ah! now you are all wide awake again! — and these kisses —"

"Oh, you are so handsome, dearest Letitia."

"You say so. But —"

"But it is true," and he clasped her in his arms.

An hour afterward Lady Letitia Lade was standing by the magnificent bed.

Glancing toward the prince, who was sleeping a profound lethargic slumber, she murmured to herself, "The cold-blooded villain! Oh, that I was compelled to play the hypocrite with him! But he imbibed the narcotic in the large dram of brandy which I gave him, and he will not awake for hours to come."

Then a smile of triumph played on the moist coral lips

of the Amazon, and she drew from beneath the prince's pillow the golden chain to which was suspended the key of curious workmanship. Therewith opening the desk of his Royal Highness, she proceeded to ransack its contents, and in the course of a few minutes she found the papers for which she was searching.

"'Tis as I thought," she said to herself, again speaking low and murmuringly with her liquid, musical voice. "The traitor, the false friend! But you shall be avenged, Meagles; you shall be avenged, even if I do not succeed in procuring your restoration to this country."

Then, locking the desk and replacing the chain with the key underneath the pillow of the prince, Lady Lade secured the papers about her person and took her departure as noiselessly as possible by the secret staircase.

When his Royal Highness awoke at a late hour in the morning, the first conviction that broke upon his mind was that he had a most distressing headache, and then the incidents of the night began to present themselves in due order to his memory. He recollected the hideous dream which had made him endure such exquisite tortures, and those painful reminiscences were followed by that of the visit of Lady Lade.

Yes, she had been with him, — but for how long? He knew not. The last incident that dwelt in his mind was a laughing proposal which she made him that each should drink a dram of brandy, and he recollected that he had as good-humouredly assented to the proposition and taken his share first, she herself pouring it out and handing it to him. Then he must have fallen into a deep sleep, for he remembered nothing more.

But she was gone, the beautiful huntress had disappeared; and a vague suspicion of something wrong slowly sprang up in the mind of the prince. Her mysterious visit, that conversation about Meagles, the dead sleep which had fallen upon him the moment after he had drunk the brandy, the departure of the lady before he awoke, the unpleasant sensations which he now experienced, and which struck him as being the result of a powerful narcotic, all these circumstances appeared to link themselves together and form a chain of evidence to support the misgivings which he felt.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVIL TIDINGS

WHILE the prince was thus yielding to his gloomy reflections, Germain, the French valet, stole gently into the apartment and advanced on tiptoe toward the couch to ascertain whether his master was awake. Then, perceiving that the royal eyes were wide open, the dependent bowed and stood in an attitude which showed that he was desirous of being permitted to speak.

"Well, what is it, Germain?" demanded the prince, impatiently, for he was very far from being in the best possible humour.

"May it please your Royal Highness," said the valet, "Mrs. Brace solicits an immediate interview on the most important business. She wishes to know whether your Royal Highness will deign to visit her, or whether it is the royal command that she shall wait upon your Royal Highness."

"Then the business is decidedly urgent, eh?" exclaimed the prince. "Well, let Mrs. Brace come to me by the secret staircase as soon as possible; and in the meantime I shall get up."

Germain bowed and retired; but, having despatched the message to the milliner, he hastened back to the royal apartment to assist at the toilet of his master. The prince, however, only dressed himself in a loose *déshabillé*; and by the time this was done, Mrs. Brace made her appearance. Germain then retired, and the heir apparent was left alone with the milliner.

"Oh, what a terrible calamity has occurred!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, at once giving vent to the expression of that profound trouble which agitated her.

"What, in the name of God, is the matter?" demanded his Royal Highness, becoming seriously alarmed.

"Rose Foster, the unhappy girl —" ejaculated the milliner.

"Well, well, what of her?" cried the heir apparent.

"She is in prison, your Royal Highness —"

"In prison!" repeated the prince, starting from his chair as if he were suddenly galvanized.

"Yes, in prison, on a charge of murder," added the milliner, quivering from head to foot and her luxuriant bosom heaving and sinking rapidly with the deep emotion which agitated within.

"Is it possible, or am I dreaming?" exclaimed the prince, pressing his hand to his brow. "The beautiful name of Rose associated with the horrible word murder! Oh, no, no, it cannot be!"

"And yet it is as true as that I am here to tell you the sad tale, or that you are there to hear it," said Mrs. Brace, in a tone that left no possible room for any further doubt upon the subject.

"But she is utterly incapable of such a crime," ejaculated his Royal Highness, still cruelly bewildered.

"Of that I am well aware," rejoined the milliner. "Nevertheless, a crushing amount of circumstantial evidence weighs against her, and it is impossible at present to say whether the matter will take a turn when the examination comes on at noon this day. At all events, it is probable that the girl may be led into revelations but too well calculated to compromise your Royal Highness and myself."

"And yet Rose possesses a generous disposition," exclaimed the prince.

"But she will scarcely scruple to tell the truth — all the truth," returned the milliner, emphatically, "to account for her becoming a houseless wanderer last night when the deed was committed —"

"Tell me the circumstances of the case," interrupted the prince. "At present I am thoroughly in the dark concerning it. Who has been murdered, where was the crime committed, and how happened it that the accusation should be made against this poor girl?"

"All I know upon the subject is this," answered Mrs. Brace: "that about an hour ago the matron of the infirmary

of Clerkenwell Prison called upon me to state that a young person had been taken thither last night on a charge of murdering a certain William Dudley, the valet of the Honourable Mr. Eaton, who is the only son of Lord Marchmont. It appears that the crime took place in some unfinished buildings in the north of London; and Rose was captured while flying from the spot."

"But it is impossible that she could have been guilty," exclaimed the prince.

"I have already told your Royal Highness I do not believe that she is," answered Mrs. Brace. "To return, however, to what I was saying, the matron of the infirmary informed me that the young prisoner had given her name as Rose Foster, and had stated that she had been for some weeks in the employment of myself, but that she had quitted me suddenly for reasons which she should explain if necessary. The matron accordingly visited me to ascertain if those statements were correct. I not only assured her that they were, but likewise expressed my firm conviction of the innocence of the girl, to whom I sent a very kind message by the matron. And now your Royal Highness will please to tell me what is to be done in this most distressing case, for if Rose should explain to the magistrate the causes which drove her forth from my house, I am totally undone."

"What, in the name of Heaven, do you advise?" demanded the prince, becoming more and more agitated every instant. "For my part, I feel as if I were looking through a fog."

"But in the midst of it there is a pit yawning to swallow us both up," observed Mrs. Brace, in a tone so profoundly solemn that it caused the prince to tremble with a cold shudder from head to foot.

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and his Royal Highness exclaimed, with petulant impatience, "Come in."

Germain entered, bowed, and said, "May it please your Royal Highness, a person wishes to see Mrs. Brace immediately upon very particular business."

"Who is it?" demanded the prince.

"A young lady who gives the name of Forrester," was the response.

"Ah! one of my own girls," ejaculated the milliner.

"You had better see what she wants and then come back to me," said the prince.

Mrs. Brace accordingly retired; and the heir apparent began to pace to and fro in an agitated manner, for the terrible intelligence he had this morning received troubled him sorely and quite threw into the background of his memory the incidents of the past night.

In a few minutes the milliner returned, or rather, staggered back into the royal apartment, her eyes wild and haggard, her countenance deadly pale, and her entire form trembling convulsively.

"What, in the name of God, is the matter?" demanded the prince, rushing forward and catching her in his arms.

"Great Heaven! what misfortunes, what calamities!" murmured the wretched Mrs. Brace, in broken sentences, as she sank back in the chair to which the prince bore her.

"Speak, I conjure you to speak, my dear Fanny," exclaimed his Royal Highness. "What is the matter? What new misadventure has occurred?"

"Another murder, another horrible murder, and one of my girls in custody upon the charge!" returned Mrs. Brace, gasping forth the words with difficulty. "Oh, ruin is coming upon me! I see it, plain and palpable —"

"Cease, cease these lamentations," cried the prince, speaking with feverish impatience as he recovered from the shock which the milliner's terrible revelation had caused him to experience. "Surely your brain must be wandering, your ideas are unsettled, you are labouring under a delusion."

"Would to God that I were!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, pressing her hands to her throbbing brows and shuddering visibly. "Rose Foster at Clerkenwell Gaol, Caroline Walters in Horsemonger Lane Prison, each accused of a diabolical murder, each able to make revelations that will bring down ruin, utter ruin, upon my head — O God! it is more than I can bear!"

And the wretched woman burst into an agonized fit of weeping.

This efflux of tears consoled her somewhat, or, at all events, relieved her, and in a few minutes she wiped her eyes, saying, "Misfortunes never come alone, and these are black and threatening indeed."

"But the second calamity — what is it?" demanded the prince.

"The midwife in Fore Street, the woman whom I have often named to you, was murdered last night," said Mrs. Brace; "and one of my girls, a certain Caroline Walters, has been taken into custody on suspicion of having perpetrated the deed."

"And is that suspicion well founded, think you?" inquired his Royal Highness.

"Alas! yes," was the mournful response. "Caroline Walters is as capable of the crime imputed to her as Rose Foster is incapable of the deed with which she is charged."

"And from what channel have you learned this new misfortune?" asked the Prince. "Who sent Miss Forrester to you?"

"A Bow Street officer has just been to my house," returned Mrs. Brace. "Indeed, he is waiting there now, in case I should like to see him. For although the murder of the midwife was committed in Lambeth, the magistrates of which district will examine the wretched girl presently, yet this Bow Street officer has been engaged to institute the usual inquiries concerning the accused; and he is now employed in both cases. What shall I do? Would you advise me to see him?"

"I have a very great mind to see him myself," observed the prince. "These Bow Street runners are men who will do anything for money. They can collect evidence to suit just which side they please, to make black seem white or white black."

"Oh, if you think, my dear prince, if you have a hope, to save Rose Foster, yes, and Caroline Walters likewise," gasped Mrs. Brace, throwing herself at the feet of his Royal Highness and seizing both his hands with nervous violence in her own, "I implore, I beseech that you will see this man —"

"Yes, I will see him," ejaculated the heir apparent, forcing the milliner to rise. "But would you seek to save that Caroline Walters, whom you believe guilty, as well as our poor Rose Foster, whom we feel to be innocent?"

"We must save them both, prince," answered Mrs. Brace. "The revelations which Caroline Walters could make concerning me —"

"Enough," ejaculated his Royal Highness, who appeared to have made up his mind to play a resolute and determined part. "Go and bring the Bow Street officer hither by the private staircase."

"In five minutes he shall be here," answered Mrs. Brace, her countenance lighting up with hope.

She then hurried away, and the prince resumed his walk up and down the room; but this pacing to and fro was less troubled than before, inasmuch as he persuaded himself that the Bow Street officer would be enabled to avert the peculiar evils which now wore so menacing an aspect.

In a short time the door of the private staircase was opened again, and Mrs. Brace reappeared, followed by a tall, stout, middle-aged man, shabbily dressed, and carrying a huge stick in his hand. On being thus introduced into the presence of the prince, the officer made a bow which, though very low, was as awkward and ungainly as if it were an elephant practising an obeisance. Then advancing toward his Royal Highness in obedience to a hastily whispered intimation from the lips of Mrs. Brace, he made another bow and waited to be spoken to.

"What is your name, my good fellow?" inquired the prince, adopting a very conciliatory tone.

"Peter Grumley, may it please your Royal Highness," answered the official, in a voice which was as rough and hoarse as if he were speaking through a cracked bassoon, for the truth was that he had been singing the best part of the night at a free-and-easy.

"Well, Mr. Peter Grumley, we shall know each other better presently," said the heir apparent. "I believe you are an officer at Bow Street."

"The head officer, at your Royal Highness's service," was the response, accompanied by another elephantine bow. "In fact, this here lady," he continued, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward Mrs. Brace, "has told me as how that your Royal Highness has a mind to put a summut in my way, and I should be proud to do anythink to please your Royal Highness, let alone the recompense attending it."

"And I may depend upon your caution and secrecy respecting my interference in the business that I wish to consult you upon?" said the heir apparent.

"I'd sooner slit my windpipe than blab a syllable," exclaimed Mr. Peter Grumley, with more emphasis than elegance. "Besides, it's my dooty to obey your Royal Highness, which will some day be the suverin of these rel-ems."

And the embryo "sovereign of the realms" could not help smiling at the pronunciation of the Bow Street officer, who, thinking that he was bound to take the cue of good manners from the prince, gave a tremendous grin, as if his head were suddenly opening from ear to ear.

"But let us hasten to business," cried the heir apparent, "for time is precious."

Mr. Grumley's mouth instantly closed, and he became all attention.

"I believe you are engaged in sifting the particulars of the two dreadful murders which were committed last night?" said the prince, interrogatively.

"Such is my vocation, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Grumley.

"And what is your opinion of each case?" demanded the prince.

"Well, about the one what took place in the buildings up by Barnsbury Park," rejoined the officer, "I think there's some mystery as will make matters turn up different from what they now appears; for it don't seem natral that a delicate young gal of sixteen should murder a middle-aged walley with whom she doesn't appear to have had any connection whatsoever. As for t'other case, the one over in Lambeth, I sent my man Mobbs — Please your Royal Highness," continued Grumley, interrupting himself, "Mobbs is my leftenant, as the saying is, my head muck and factotum; he's a cunning blade, is Mobbs — 'tis the same wot pitched his wife out of a three-pair back and cut his child's head off some five or six year ago. May be your Royal Highness recollects the circumstance?"

"I cannot exactly say that I do," responded the prince, with a visible shudder; but he spoke mildly, inasmuch as it was his policy just at this moment to conciliate Mr. Grumley's good opinion as much as possible. "But you were about to give me some information respecting the dreadful affair in Fore Street."

"Yes, so I were," observed the official. "Well, I was

on the pint of telling your Royal Highness that I sent my friend Mobbs over to look arter that little business there, and he's quite convinced, from all he saw and heard, that the gal Caroline Walters must have butchered the old 'ooman. So in the fust case my opinion is that the accusation is wrongfully made, and in the second I think the charge is correct."

"Can you undertake to get Rose Foster off?" demanded the prince, now coming direct to the point.

"I can't say, but I think I might," responded Mr. Grumley.

"And Caroline Walters, would it be impossible, utterly impossible —" said the prince, hesitatingly.

"Nothink is impossible, may it please your Royal Highness," observed Grumley; "but there's a many things that is very difficult, all the same."

"But you are not the man to be daunted by difficulties," remarked the heir apparent.

"Just the last feller in all creation to give up anythink in despair," returned the constable. "Me and Mobbs is the most desperatest chaps in England when we've got a partickler pint in view; and when the means doesn't turn up of their own accord, we makes 'em."

"I see that you are an enterprising man, Mr. Grumley," observed the prince. "Now, the truth is that these girls who are in custody have been in the service of Mrs. Brace, and as I take a deep interest in everything that concerns Mrs. Brace —"

"I don't want no explanations and no apologies," interrupted the officer, perceiving with his natural quickness that the prince had special reasons of his own for the course he was pursuing. "If your Royal Highness wishes that them young gals should be got off, I'll do my best, and Mobbs shall do his best also. But it will cost summut handsome —"

"Not a word more upon that subject," interrupted the prince. "Mrs. Brace will give you five hundred guineas as an earnest of future generosity, and if you succeed in the matter, another sum to the like amount shall be yours."

"I'm very much obleeged to your Royal Highness, very much indeed," said Grumley, with a low bow; and he then turned to follow the milliner away from the apartment.

CHAPTER XIX

THE EXAMINATION

It was midday, and the police office at Bow Street was crowded to excess. The intelligence that a young and beautiful girl was about to be examined on a charge of committing the foul crime of murder had spread like wild-fire; and although the morning papers contained not a line upon the subject,—for news was not published so speedily in those times as it is at present,—yet the entire metropolis had already experienced the sensation of mingled interest and horror invariably attendant upon the circulation of such a rumour. The result was that numbers of persons had been impelled by curiosity to the police court, which was speedily filled; and an immense multitude, unable to obtain admittance, blocked up the street.

Presently a hackney-coach broke through the congregated mass and drove up to the door of the office. Then, when Rose Foster alighted in the custody of Grumley and Mobbs, instead of being saluted with the yells of execration usually poured forth on such occasions, the young girl's ears caught expressions of sympathy from every side. Nor few were the tongues which expressed a conviction that so sweet a creature could not possibly have committed the odious crime laid to her charge; and these observations enhanced that courage which now armed the poor orphan girl, the courage inspired by conscious innocence.

With modest dignity and with a winning maidenly reserve, as unaffected as every attribute of her virgin soul was guileless and artless, did Rose Foster pass from the hackney-coach along the passage leading to the office, on entering which she instantly became the focus for the looks of all present. A momentary faintness came over her, an evanescent dizzi-

ness made her stagger back a pace or two; but recovering herself even before the rude hands of Grumley were stretched forth to sustain her, the maiden ascended with a firm step into the dock.

And now the marks of sympathy which she had already received outside were renewed within; and several persons present were moved to tears at the contemplation of that sweetly interesting young creature, so mild and innocent in looks, so touchingly beautiful, and so modest in demeanour, accused of a crime totally incompatible with her seemingly gentle nature.

Near the magistrate the Honourable Arthur Eaton was seated. A profound melancholy sat like a sombre shadow upon the countenance of the young man; and the moment that Rose Foster was conducted into the court, he fixed upon her a long, searching, penetrating look, as if to fathom the innermost recesses of her soul. Then, bewildered and baffled, not knowing how to believe her guilty, yet not daring to give his own convictions the lie by pronouncing her innocent, full of uncertainty and of grief, pained and anguished at the idea that so much turpitude was possibly concealed by an equally consummate hypocrisy, Arthur Eaton withdrew his eyes from the pale countenance on which dwelt all the serenity of conscious virtue.

In a little box or pew on the right hand of the magistrate sat a barrister dressed in his wig and gown. He was a short, thin, pale-faced man, with hatchet features, compressed lips, and keen, searching eyes which went wandering restlessly about the court, but appeared to settle for an instant upon every countenance, one after another. This was Counsellor Sharply, one of the most noted Old Bailey barristers, and whom Mr. Grumley had lost no time in engaging the instant he had received the five hundred guineas from Mrs. Brace. Not that Mr. Grumley had any particular instructions to give Counsellor Sharply in the matter; but he had told the learned gentleman to watch the case narrowly, — a general hint that he was to throw as much discredit upon the prosecution as possible.

And now the proceedings commenced by the magistrate inquiring the name of the prisoner.

"Your worship," said Counsellor Sharply, rising and bowing politely to the bench, "I appear for Miss Rose

Foster, the young lady who has the misfortune to stand before you."

"Her name is Rose Foster, then?" observed the magistrate, inquiringly.

"That is her name, your worship," responded the barrister; "and I may add that she has been for some weeks in the service of Mrs. Brace, the well-known and highly respectable milliner of Pall Mall. This lady, who, by the way, enjoys the patronage of all the aristocracy, has entrusted me with the defence of Miss Foster; for Mrs. Brace is well assured that there must be some fearful mistake in the charge so far as it applies to the young lady whom your worship will presently release from custody."

This address was delivered with the insinuating smile which gentlemen of the long robe so well know how to assume at times; and the magistrate nodded once or twice, as much as to say, "Well, I dare say it will be so; but we shall see."

"I should like to state, your worship," observed Mr. Grumley, in his hoarse bassoon voice, "that what Counsellor Sharply says is perfectly correct. I made inquiries down in Pall Mall just now, and Mrs. Brace assured me that a better young gal or one less likely to do wrong never broke bread. Mrs. Brace is a highly respectable lady, your worship, and will come for'ard if required to speak to the prisoner's character."

"Very well, Mr. Grumley," said the magistrate; "we shall see all about that presently. Now let us hear the charge."

The Honourable Arthur Eaton stood up and immediately responded to his name, which was called by the clerk. He deposed as follows:

"It was about eight o'clock last evening that I proceeded to visit certain buildings which are in progress of construction near Barnsbury Park, on the northern outskirt of London. I was accompanied by my valet, William Dudley. The workmen had previously left, and we were alone, or fancied ourselves to be alone, on the premises. Dudley lighted a lantern, by the aid of which we inspected all that had been done to the edifice since the preceding night. There is a small courtyard in the centre, from which four passages branch off. We were walking along one of these passages, when I took the lantern from Dudley's hand and paused a

moment to examine something that had struck me to be a defect in the wall. Dudley continued advancing in front, and he had just entered the courtyard, when a cry burst from his lips, and he fell down heavily. I rushed forward, and at the very same moment that I thus bounded into the yard by one passage, I caught a glimpse of a female dressed in black plunging into another passage on the opposite side. I did not pursue her because I was struck motionless by the horrible spectacle which met my eyes. William Dudley lay a corpse at my feet. For nearly a minute I must have remained spellbound, — speechless, paralyzed, transfixed with dread horror. At length the very excess of anguish forced me into motion; my limbs were unlocked, my tongue became unloosened. Raising the cry of ‘Murder,’ I fell upon my knees, by the side of the bleeding victim, and I know not how long a period elapsed, but certainly not many minutes, ere some labourers appeared, dragging in a female dressed in black. The instant that I caught sight of the mourning garments and heard her screams, I naturally concluded that she was the murderess, and I believe that I said so at the time.”

“But you did not catch a glimpse of the face of the female figure whom you saw flitting away from the scene of the murder?” exclaimed Counsellor Sharply.

“No, I saw not the face then,” exclaimed Eaton.

“And you cannot swear that the female figure seen in the first instance was the prisoner at the bar?”

“That would be swearing to the effect that I know beyond all doubt that the prisoner at the bar is the murderess,” replied Eaton; “whereas I should be sorry to make an averment half so positive. And I beg you to believe,” he added, emphatically, “that I sincerely, ardently, unfeignedly hope her innocence will transpire.”

“No doubt it will,” exclaimed Counsellor Sharply: though at the moment he did not precisely see how such a consummation was to be reached, for the evidence was certainly of a most damnatory nature against his client.

He then proceeded to cross-question Mr. Eaton, who frankly admitted that he knew of no possible reason which could induce the prisoner to assassinate his valet. It evidently was not for the sake of plunder, inasmuch as the murderess must have seen him (Eaton) inside the passage

with the lantern in his hand, at the instant she struck the blow; and consequently she was well aware, when striking it, that she must save herself by flight the moment afterward and could not remain to rifle her victim. Mr. Eaton likewise stated that Miss Foster was a total stranger to him; nor had he ever heard her name mentioned by William Dudley, much less seen them together.

One of the labourers who had arrested Rose was then examined; and he stated the circumstance under which he and his companions had been induced to detain her.

Mr. Counsellor Sharply now elicited the important fact that whereas it was by a passage running in a northern direction from the courtyard that Mr. Eaton had seen the female figure disappear, it was on the southern side of the building that Rose Foster was flying so precipitately when she was encountered and captured by the labourers.

A surgeon who had examined the body of the deceased was now summoned, and he described the nature of the wound which had caused his death. He likewise produced the weapon with which the fatal deed was accomplished, and he declared that the blow must have been inflicted by an arm that was either endowed with great strength, or else nerved at the moment by the most malignant passions.

At this declaration all eyes were turned upon Rose Foster, and every one felt how inconsistent the black deed was with the ingenuousness stamped upon that sweet, pensive countenance, and how incompatible was its violence with the grace and lightness of that rounded arm.

"Hand me the weapon, if you please, sir," said Counsellor Sharply to the surgeon.

This demand was instantaneously complied with; and the barrister observed that it was a large clasp-knife originally provided with two blades, but one of which had been broken close off at the haft. The other, which had inflicted the death-wound, was about six inches long, pointed like a dagger, and sharp as a razor.

While turning this weapon over and over in his hand, and affecting to regard it with the closest scrutiny, though in reality only gaining time to rack his imagination what question to ask next, the counsellor suddenly observed something on the handle which induced him to ask for a towel and some water. These were speedily brought, and

in the midst of a breathless silence did he with his own hand wash away the blood that was encrusted upon the buckhorn handle of the knife. Then, having examined it with a real attention, he whispered something to Mr. Peter Grumley, who in his turn scrutinized the knife with a vivid keenness of look; and his man Mobbs was next admitted to this consultation, the nature of which, although it took place in open court, was still confined to the three persons who were engaged in it.

Mobbs shook his head knowingly, Grumley whispered to the counsellor, and the learned gentleman himself, drawing his gown over his shoulders with a very important air, addressed the magistrate in the following terms:

"From something which has transpired, your worship, and which it will be inconvenient to mention at this stage of the proceedings, I have to request that the examination be postponed for about a couple of hours. It is now two o'clock, and if your worship would not object to take the case again at four —"

"I can have no objection to accede to the learned gentleman's request," observed the magistrate.

Counsellor Sharply then looked significantly at Grumley and Mobbs, both of whom disappeared immediately from the police office.

"Now," exclaimed the learned gentleman, wrapping up the knife in a piece of brief-paper, "I have to request your worship to retain this weapon locked up in your desk until the renewal of the examination."

This demand was likewise acceded to; and the counsellor then wrote a few words upon a slip of paper, which he folded carefully and handed to the magistrate. This functionary read its contents with evident surprise, and for a few moments appeared uncertain how to act. Meantime Rose Foster and all the spectators were gazing upon him with the most breathless suspense and even torturing interest; for it was quite clear that some incident of vital importance had developed itself in favour of the young and beautiful accused.

"If your worship hesitates," said Counsellor Sharply, in a determined but respectful tone, "I shall make the demand not only aloud, but in a far more formal manner."

"Perhaps this proceeding will be the best, Mr. Sharply,"

observed the magistrate, glancing significantly at the paper, "and I accordingly act in compliance with your wishes."

Then, without any further hesitation, he handed the slip to the Honourable Arthur Eaton, who appeared perfectly wonder-stricken by its contents. The colour went and came with extraordinary rapidity upon his cheeks, and when he endeavoured to speak, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. At length he found words to express his feelings, and, starting from his seat, he exclaimed, "I protest with indignation —"

"Silence, sir! The case is adjourned; clear the court!" cried the magistrate.

"Clear the court!" shouted the usher; and the half-dozen constables and runners lurking about began to bundle the spectators out of the place, so that the din thus created entirely drowned the words of Arthur Eaton, who was continuing to address the magistrate and Counsellor Sharply in an animated and excited manner.

Rose Foster was removed from the dock and conducted to a private room, where she found Mrs. Brace seated before the fire, weeping bitterly.

The young maiden started back on recognizing the milliner; but remembering certain assurances which had been conveyed to her by Mr. Grumley, she advanced toward the woman through whose agency she had experienced so much persecution and misery. But Mrs. Brace caught her in her arms, and straining her vehemently to her bosom, murmured, "Pardon me, dear Rose, pardon me, for all that I have done."

"Ah, madam, I am not vindictive," said the young girl, bursting into tears; "and if you are really sorry for everything you have made me suffer —"

"I am, I am, my God! believe that I am!" cried the milliner, shedding her crocodile torrents over the generous maiden who was confiding and unsophisticated enough, despite all her bitter experience, to put faith in the professed sincerity of the vile woman's compunction.

"Then do I pardon you, Mrs. Brace, yes, with a true Christian forgiveness," said Rose. "And I even feel bound to express my gratitude toward you for interesting yourself in my behalf this day, likewise for the assurances you sent me by the constable."

"What did he tell you, my love?" demanded Mrs. Brace. "Let me know all he said, that I may see whether he delivered my message properly and completely."

"He told me that yourself and the prince had paid him a very large sum of money to take my cause in hand and make my innocence transpire," said Rose; "and that yourself and his Royal Highness were well satisfied that I am innocent. He moreover advised me to leave everything to the barrister whom he had retained in my behalf, and besought me to spare the prince and you in any statement that I might unavoidably be called upon to make in order to account for my wandering abroad last night. He added that my innocence was sure to be rendered apparent, and that on being discharged he was authorized to give me a hundred guineas on your behalf, and either recommend me to some respectable family or see me safe off by coach to any country place whither I might choose to repair. This was the sum of the communications made to me by the tall, stout constable."

"And you may perceive, my dear Rose," observed Mrs. Brace, "that the prince and myself are deeply penitent for all we have caused you to undergo. You have forgiven me as a Christian — I dare not ask you to look upon me again as a friend. Nevertheless, I will act as one toward you; and please God that your innocence becomes manifest to-day."

"Oh, is there any doubt of it? Can there be any uncertainty in the case?" exclaimed Rose, suddenly alarmed by the milliner's observation. "What means this prorogation of the hearing? What meant all that mystery respecting the knife? And what was the reason that Mr. Eaton became so powerfully affected at the end of the proceedings?"

"You forget, my love," answered Mrs. Brace, "that I have not been present at the examination. I have been waiting here in the cruellest suspense, and in tears, as you found me. All I know is that something important suddenly transpired in your favour, and that the renewal of the investigation promises to be characterized by the most vivid, startling, and thrilling interest."

"Alas! alas! if circumstantial evidence should prevail against me!" murmured Rose, clasping her hands convulsively at the bare idea of being consigned to that gaol which

bears a name that makes even the innocent tremble — the name of Newgate.

“Do not give way to despondency, my dear child,” said Mrs. Brace, in so soothing a tone and lavishing such tender caresses at the same time that the poor orphan girl not only forgave her from her heart for the past, but felt comforted and cheered by the maternal affection displayed with so much apparent warmth toward her.

CHAPTER XX

A MAGNANIMOUS WOMAN

WHILE the preceding incidents were occurring at the police office in Bow Street, a scene which we must interrupt our narrative to describe was taking place at Carlton House.

For it was a little after twelve at noon on this memorable day, and the prince had just achieved his morning toilet, when he was startled by a knock at the door leading to the private staircase.

Dismissing Germain, his Royal Highness hastened to answer the summons, and the Amazon entered the magnificent apartment.

"Ah! my sweet and mysterious visitress of the dark hours," ejaculated the heir apparent; but he stopped short suddenly, for the handsome countenance of the lady wore an expression of severity verging upon sternness, and she made an impatient gesture as much as to imply that she was in no humour for jocularities.

The prince closed the door, and drawing himself haughtily up to his full height, he said, "May I ask what has procured me the honour of this second visit from Lady Lade within a few hours, and what is the reason that she wears a gloomy aspect?"

"Has your Royal Highness nothing wherewith to reproach yourself?" demanded the Amazon, fixing her large dark eyes full upon him.

"Doubtless I am culpable of many small vices, in which, if I recollect, your ladyship has borne a share," responded the prince, now assuming a tone of irony: "once in yonder bathroom, and last night —"

"Oh, you may affect satire to your heart's content, prince," exclaimed the huntress, her splendid countenance

becoming crimson with indignation. "But permit me to inquire whether that latter weakness on my part to which you allude — I mean my visit to this chamber last night — engendered any misgiving in your mind?"

"In good sooth, my sweet friend," said the prince, still maintaining an ironical tone in revenge for the proud bearing and severe looks assumed by the Amazon, "in good sooth, I was inspired with some partial misgiving and vague suspicion of a sinister purpose on your side, not, however, by the circumstance of your kind visit of love and pleasure, but by the mystery attending your disappearance."

"And the brandy which we drank together?" said the huntress, now smiling with malicious archness.

"Ah! by Jove, I remember," exclaimed the prince, starting uneasily. "Come, my dear Letitia," he continued, suddenly assuming a conciliatory tone and manner, "tell me what is the meaning of this change in your aspect toward me, and how I have offended you. For that there is something wrong —"

"You are well aware," added Lady Letitia, finishing the sentence for him. "Well, it is useless to bandy words in this manner; and therefore I will at once confess that I had a special and sinister purpose in visiting your Royal Highness during the past night, and that purpose I accomplished."

"Yes, you became my bedfellow —" began the prince, unable to suppress a sneer.

"A truce to flippancy," exclaimed the huntress. "This matter is serious, and your Royal Highness beholds before you a woman who is as strong in her resolution to work out a settled plan as she is frail and yielding in the school of love. In a word, then, I have vowed to effect the restoration of Meagles, or at least to avenge him."

"Ah! it is as I more than half-feared," muttered the prince, changing colour. Then, fixing upon the Amazon a look full of that fiendish malignity which formed no inconsiderable element of his disposition, he said, "Beware how you wage war against me, Letitia, for I will crush you as if you were a worm."

"I defy you, by Heaven! I defy you!" exclaimed the huntress, her eyes filling with a more than usual radiancy, her countenance becoming of the richest carnation. "Nay,

look not so black upon me. Your brow may lower with storms, but your eyes shoot forth no lightnings that kill. For once you have to deal with a woman who will fight you with any weapons that you choose to name. Shall it be swords or pistols? Oh, no, no, the courage of your Royal Highness cannot be screwed up to such a pitch," said the Amazon, accenting her words with a cutting bitterness. "Shall it be treachery and intrigue? Ah! there you are more proficient and likewise more daring, because snakes creep out of sight, through the long grass, and then insidiously sting their victims."

"By the living God! I will not endure this insulting language," exclaimed the prince, becoming purple in the face. "Depart, woman, or I will summon my lackeys to thrust you ignominiously forth."

"Dare to call a single domestic hither," said the Amazon, in a calm but determined tone, "and I will horsewhip him as soundly as I will presently thrash your Royal Highness if you dare to menace me with such insolence again. For mark me, and tremble," she exclaimed, with a strong emphasis. Then, after a few moments' pause, during which she kept her eyes dauntlessly and defiantly fixed upon the prince, she added, "You are in my power, completely in my power."

The royal voluptuary trembled from head to foot with a rage to which he dared not give vent; for he saw that there was a sternness of purpose on the part of the Amazon which must be well backed by a consciousness of possessing that power which she proclaimed herself to hold in terror over him.

"Now listen to me with attention," she said, "and see whether I have been putting forth idle vapourings and empty boastings. Last night I visited your chamber with a special object in view, and to gain that object I prostituted myself to your embraces, which were loathsome to me. But it was necessary to my plan that I should send you into a deep slumber, and I became your bedfellow in order to obtain an opportunity of practising that cajolery which would induce you to drink from the glass that I had drugged beforehand."

"But this was the foulest treachery, the most damnable perfidy that woman ever practised," exclaimed the prince, casting looks of demoniac hatred upon the Amazon.

"Not worse than the treachery and the perfidy which your Royal Highness practised toward the man who had been so good a friend to you," returned the huntress, her coral lips thus shooting forth the sharpest arrows. "But now shall you learn the purpose which I had in view last night, and this explanation will afford the key to that mystery which places you in my power. In a word, then, Prince of Wales, I have possessed myself of your most secret, most valuable papers."

His Royal Highness staggered back as if suddenly struck with the sharp blow of a hammer, for all the fearful truth broke upon him in an instant, and he saw that he was indeed in the power of a woman who was not likely to surrender up the surreptitiously acquired talisman of her influence until all her objects were fully accomplished.

"Listen again," she resumed, after a short pause, "and I will tell you how I discovered that it was you through whose agency poor Meagles was sent out of the country. The other morning his landlady received a letter stating in concise terms that he had been detected in treasonable designs against the sovereign, but that through the leniency of the paternal government he was permitted to repair without delay to North America, on condition that he never again return to his native land. This letter was shown to me, and I instantly saw therein the evidences of some infernal treachery. But my suspicions did not at once fall upon your Royal Highness. On the contrary, I rather fancied that it was some device of your despotic father, the king, to rob you of the services of a man who was so faithful and so devoted. But when I learned that on the very same day when Meagles disappeared your valet Germain had been to his lodgings, had remained there for a short time, and had then taken his departure, with some frivolous excuse, it struck me like an inspiration that there was something wrong. My suspicions were thus directed into the right channel; and on examining Meagles's writing desk, I saw enough to convince me that some one had been there already. It was not then very difficult to put two and two together, and I resolved to take up my friend's cause with a more zealous championship than if it were my own. The campaign has been opened, it commenced last night, and the advantage remains to me. By a little stratagem, a

great object was achieved. The papers, those valuable, those important papers, are in my possession; and I am now here to dictate my own terms to you, the discomfited, the defeated, the humiliated enemy."

"Meagles deserved all that has happened to him," said the prince, in a thick, hoarse voice and with a dogged manner, "for he stole the papers from me in the first instance, and it was by their aid that you and he overawed my father."

"We will not dispute upon the point," responded the Amazon, calmly and resolutely. "Suffice it for my purpose and for you to know that the papers are now in my hands. Yes, the Lightfoot certificate, which proves your father to be a perjured miscreant and a cold-blooded traitor to a young, lovely, and confiding woman whose heart he doubtless broke —"

"Calumniate not your king!" exclaimed the prince, trembling with rage.

"Then the documents proving your own marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert," continued the Amazon, heedless of the interruption, "a marriage which, if proclaimed to the public, would lose you the crown that you hope to wear —"

"Ah! do you dare menace me?" cried the prince, clenching his fists and grinding his teeth.

"Then the correspondence which shows that this same Mrs. Fitzherbert, your own wife," proceeded the remorseless Amazon, "became the paramour of the Marquis of Bellois, the mother of a child, too —"

"Fiend! devil! demoness!" ejaculated the heir apparent, stamping his feet with fury and extending his arms menacingly toward the huntress.

"Rage on, rage on, I defy you!" she exclaimed; and her musical laugh rang through the chamber.

"The papers,— you have them about your person,— yes, the plunder is concealed beneath your garments," cried the prince, in a hoarse, thick voice and in broken sentences. "But, by the eternal God, I will tear them from you, I will rend your garments to shreds, I will murder you, sooner than let you escape me."

And with a species of savage yell, such as a hyena sends forth when goaded into fury, he sprang toward the huntress.

But, nimble and agile as the young fawn in the forest, the lady darted aside; and at the same moment a bright dagger

which she drew from the bosom of her frock coat gleamed across the eyes of the prince.

"Touch me, and I strike," she exclaimed, her handsome countenance suddenly expressing an implacable sternness.

For nearly a minute his Royal Highness stood gazing upon her, uncertain how to act. His white and quivering lips denoted the fell passions of the malignant coward; for he could have found it in his heart to murder her then and there, had he not dreaded to encounter the sharp poniard which the Amazon displayed so suddenly.

"It is useless for us to quarrel thus, Letitia," he said, at length. "Let us come to terms."

"Yes, but I must dictate them," was the response.

"Put up your weapon, and we will look the matter calmly in the face," cried the prince.

"Oh, I am not afraid to give you even the chance of falling upon me unawares," exclaimed the Amazon, as she returned the dagger to its sheath in the bosom of her garment.

"Do you take me for an assassin?" demanded his Royal Highness, flinging upon her a ferocious look.

"Since you ask me the question," replied the huntress, coolly, "I will candidly confess that there are no crimes of which I deem you to be incapable."

The prince bit his lip till the blood stained his teeth. Oh, if he could only have rung the bell and given that woman into custody, if he could only have sent her after Meagles across the seas! But no, he dared not; for the papers which she possessed contained secrets involving his honour and his heirship to the crown. He was therefore compelled to smother his rancour, stifle his hatred, eat the words that rose to his lips, and swallow the retorts which his indignation prompted. And this was a terrible, terrible humiliation for the first gentleman in Europe to endure.

"Let us keep to the point immediately before us," he said, after a long pause. "The terms upon which you will surrender the papers, all the papers without reserve —"

"Those terms are easily dictated," interrupted the Amazon. "In the first place, Mr. Meagles must be restored to his country and his friends."

"I will procure an order from the Minister to that effect," said the prince.

"I would not trust the government a whit more than I will

you," rejoined Lady Lade. "Bad kings and princes make bad Ministers, and such is now the case in this wretched country."

"Well, Meagles shall be restored," said his Royal Highness, again biting his lip to restrain the wrath that cost him such severe struggles to prevent it from boiling over.

"Meagles shall be restored, you say? Good! That is the first point. The second," continued the Amazon, "is that he be raised to the peerage on the day of your marriage with Caroline of Brunswick, and that a pension of five thousand a year be settled upon him at the same time."

"Letitia, you are mad," exclaimed the prince, now more amazed than even angry.

"Well, if you are afraid to ask your royal father for those boons," said the huntress, coolly, "I must repair to Windsor myself. It will not be the first time that I shall have demanded of his Majesty a peerage and a pension for some one on your behalf; and provided with such important documents, it is not likely that the king will refuse my prayer."

"No, no, you need not visit Windsor a second time," exclaimed the prince. "Come, I assent to the second condition, — a peerage and pension for Meagles on my wedding-day. And that is all, I hope?"

"Yes, I have nothing more to stipulate," answered the Amazon. "But I may as well inform your Royal Highness that the papers are not about my person, nor are they accessible to you. Well concealed are they now, and well concealed will they remain until the fulfilment of the conditions just laid down. You may employ bravos to waylay and murder me, but my death would not give you back your papers. On the contrary, they would fall into the hands of persons less scrupulous than I, and instead of reaping any advantage from the crime, your ruin would ensue. I give you this warning, because I am fully aware that the idea of sending me to an eternal sleep has flashed through your brain more than once during the last quarter of an hour. You will therefore now do so at your peril."

Thus speaking, the Amazon turned away and moved toward the private door, while his Royal Highness, astounded at the fact of her having read his thoughts so easily, remained transfixed and petrified with horror and amazement.

"By the bye," she said, stopping short and looking over

her shoulder, "there must be a period fixed for the fulfilment of the conditions just settled between us. The matter can't go on for everlasting, you know. I suppose that poor Meagles has been hurried off to America in a ship-of-war? The people of England have to support navies in order that they may become instruments of oppression against themselves. God's curse will light upon such a paternal government," she added, bitterly. "But that is not the point. We were talking of Meagles, and you will do well to have a fast sailing vessel sent after him; for I accord six weeks, and no more, for the fulfilment of our terms. If that interval elapses without seeing Meagles return, then will I publish the papers. Farewell."

And having thus spoken, the magnanimous huntress quitted the royal apartment, leaving the Prince of Wales more humiliated, more disgusted with himself and all the world, and more disposed to abandon himself to despair than ever he had been before. Indeed, to tell the full truth, he was just in that humour when for a cup of the waters of oblivion he would have sold his soul to Satan.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WORKING MAN'S WIFE AND CHILDREN

AND now we have another scene to relate, which occurred contemporaneously with those described in the two preceding chapters, and to which we must direct attention ere we can return to the police office and resume the adventures of Rose Foster.

For while she was standing in the dock, soon after twelve, on this memorable day, and while the Amazon was exhibiting the magnanimous heroism of her character to the Prince of Wales, a sad and pitiable spectacle might have been seen in that garret where the wife and children of Melmoth, the working man, were huddling together.

But the working man himself was not there. The letter which he had written, and which was in the same style as that penned by Meagles, had been duly received by the unhappy woman, to whose heart it had appeared to carry the blight of death. For now did she feel herself widowed, now did she look upon her children as fatherless; and in addition to this appalling misery was the crushing idea that he, the man whom she loved so fondly, he the husband of herself and the father of her children, that he was plunged into the bitterest, deepest despair.

Oh, as that poor woman pressed her babe to her breast and cast around her eyes upon the other three children who sat near looking up into her worn countenance as if seeking for consolation there, but finding all a hopeless blank or else the sombre gloom of despair, as she thus threw her hot and tearless eyes around and at a glance embraced the unfortunate beings who were left dependent solely upon her, it seemed as if her heart-strings would snap suddenly and she must sink down beneath the intolerable load of her misfortune.

A husband torn away from a sickly, dying wife, a father from four children, the eldest of whom was a mere boy and the youngest a babe at the breast. Oh, it was too much to be borne, too much even for a strong woman to endure, and therefore enough to crush altogether that poor ailing creature who had already seen so much misery.

The reader will remember that Melmoth had robbed Meagles one night and that Meagles had subsequently bade him keep the gold, which was indeed at the time intended to relieve him. Comforts had then been introduced to the garret; but the working man would not remove into a better lodging for fear of absorbing his little store ere he should succeed in obtaining employment. Then it happened that he had about his person all his treasure at the moment when he became involved in the adventure which hurried him with such rapidity through the mock-trial at the Home Office, the journey to Woolwich, and the embarkation in the boat whence he plunged so desperately into the Thames on the night of pitchy darkness. But we must observe that when he had penned his brief and formal note, as dictated to him by the hirelings of despotic authorities, he had entrusted his gold, together with that letter, to the peace-officer, who undertook to deliver both next morning in London; but the villainous messenger left the note at the proper address, and retained the money for himself. Yes, all, every farthing did the officer keep. Not the smallest mite did he spare for the woman who was made, as it were, a widow and the children who were in like manner rendered fatherless.

And thus the few comforts which had been gathered in that garret, and the vesture which had been redeemed from pledge, all found their way back to the pawnbroker's to furnish the means of procuring bread. Woeful fate! heart-rending and agonizing was it for that poor mother to see article after article disappear, swallowed up by the ravenous maw of the monster Pauperism. And as she, day by day, saw the garret coming back to its recent state of misery, and her children lapsing into the shivering, shuddering chill of seminudity, and the landlady's looks waxing blacker and more suspicious as the weekly rent-day was approaching, the poor creature felt that she could have lain herself down to die, had it not been necessary to live on as well and as long as she could for the sake of her children.

And now the morning had arrived when the pittance was to be paid for the garret, and it was the same day as that on which the incidents of the preceding chapters took place.

Scarcely had noon been proclaimed by all the clocks of the metropolis, — those faithful servitors of Old Time with their iron tongues, — when the sharp, ominous, expected tap at the door was heard, and Mrs. Thomas, the vixenish landlady, entered the garret.

“Well, Mrs. Melmoth, how be you to-day?” asked the woman, affecting a civil tone, although she more than half-suspected that she should have to change it in a minute; for the distress of the poor family was no secret to her, her lynx eyes having marked every article that was taken out by the eldest boy to pledge.

“Mrs. Thomas, I am very ill, and nearly driven to despair with misery and anguish,” replied the poor woman; “and what is worse,” she added, bursting into tears, “I am even unable to pay you the trifle —”

“I knewed it,” ejaculated the landlady, smacking her hand against the wall as a substitute for the table which she would have struck if there had been one there. “I am robbed as completely as if I was stopped on the highway.”

“Robbed! Oh, no, no,” moaned Mrs. Melmoth. “Though poor, ay, destitute, we are honest.”

“There ain’t no such a thing as honesty amongst poor folks,” shrieked the landlady. “I tell you I’ve been robbed with my eyes hopen, and I’ll prove it. Hasn’t the things which should have been left for me to put the brokers in upon, hasn’t they been removed under my very nose —”

“They have, they have indeed,” sobbed Mrs. Melmoth, pressing her babe to her bosom and endeavouring to calm the other children, who began to cry; “but everything has been made away with to procure bread.”

“The rent should be paid first,” ejaculated Mrs. Thomas. “Now what am I to tell my landlord when he comes and asks for his money, which he will do this evening, and I’m just the half-crown short —”

“Surely, my dear Mrs. Thomas,” interrupted the working man’s wife, “you can trust me for a few days, till something turns up.”

“Nothink won’t turn up,” cried the heartless vixen. “The government is a persecuting you and yourn, and they’ll

hunt ye down to the dogs. But the chase sha'n't take place in my house, I can tell you. Besides, the tax-gatherer has already been and asked me why I keep such seditious, wickedly disposed people beneath my roof."

"You do not mean to turn us out?" exclaimed Mrs. Melmoth, casting a look of mingled terror and anguish upon the landlady.

"Yes, but I do though," was the withering, blighting response. "So tramp, be off —"

"Mercy! mercy!" screamed the poor mother; "if not for me, at least for this innocent babe, and those unfortunate children. My God! mercy! mercy!"

"No, tramp, be off, out with ye!" vociferated Mrs. Thomas, working herself up into a perfect fury. "Bundle, or I'll call in a constable."

"Come, then, my poor children — courage!" murmured Mrs. Melmoth, in a stifling voice, for she felt as if her heart must break. "Come, let us go forth into the street, and — and — beg."

As she uttered these last words, the poor woman staggered against the door-post and almost dropped the babe from her arms; for although she had often and often thought that to beggary her doom must lead, and although, for weeks and months past, her waking reveries by day and her dreams by night had depicted herself and all her children drawn up in a ghastly, ghostlike line in the public streets stretching forth the hand of mendicity, yet had she never dared breathe aloud the awful word itself until the present occasion. But now the appalling moment had arrived, the consummation of the calamity stared her in the face; she was already standing upon the threshold of that doom which she had so long foreseen and which now made her blood stagnate as if chilled in her veins.

And forth went the unhappy family, the inhuman landlady overwhelming them with reproaches because they were poor.

Oh, poverty is indeed a crime in this land of civilization and of Bible societies, in this country where religion is made so much of that there is a law to punish with the treadmill those who do not go to church, in this kingdom where a young lady at present reigns "by the grace of God."

But it was in the time of that diabolical old monster,

George III, the mad, scrofulous, and cold-bloodedly cruel grandfather of this same young lady to whom we have just alluded, it was in the time of that atrocious tyrant whom despicably sycophantic historians have covered with fulsome praises, but who was a scandal and a shame to human nature as well as a scourge and a curse to the human race, it was in his time, we say, that the working man's family turned out from their garret-home into the inclemency and houseless desolation of the open streets.

And now the oft foreshadowed doom was come at last, the long foreseen consummation was present, and the heart-broken mother of the crying, starving, shivering children found herself fated to teach them how to beg.

In Whitehall did they take their stand on this afternoon of their initiative in the arts and devices of mendicancy. But an initiative only was it, indeed; for nature, pure, unadulterated nature, traced that profound and ineffable sorrow upon the countenance of the mother, and gave that woe-begone aspect to the children. Art was not needed there; no, O God! no, the scene was all too true and all too natural.

Yes, in the great thoroughfare of Whitehall did Mrs. Melmoth take her stand, with the babe in her arms, the eldest boy and the girl on her right hand, and the youngest boy on her left. There, in that thoroughfare, where a king had once been so righteously put to death for making war on his people, that same king who is now falsely called a martyr, there was it that the working man's wife and children placed themselves to supplicate alms of the passers-by.

O working men of England, how many thousands, how many hundreds of thousands of ye have had your families go down into the streets to beg! Rise early, toil hard all day, eat of the scantiest and drink of the poorest the while, go to bed late, rise early again, pass through the same wretched routine of crushing labour and semistarvation day after day, — and what is the result? Ye cannot keep yourselves and your families from misery and wretchedness. No, destitution and then beggary or the workhouse come at last, and your end is either death on a dunghill, or death in a union, with the blessed certainty of a common deal coffin and a pauper's grave, while your children are left upon the world to go through all that you have suffered, meet the same experiences, pass through the same miseries, privations, woes, and heart-

breaking afflictions, and perish in the same way at last. Yes, working men of England, this is your doom, this is your fate. Ye who make silken textures for the indolent wealthy, are shivering in rags yourselves; ye who raise all the choicest fruits of the earth for the pampered, insolent, overbearing aristocrat are starving yourselves.

By the living God, all this is intolerable. It is enough to make ye atheists, infidels, unbelievers; and it assuredly is far more than sufficient to make ye chartists, republicans, and communists. The appalling misery and the monstrous oppression which exist in this country try your faith in God's mercy to the very uttermost; and if any one were to preach the doctrine that the world was nought save a huge, pitiless machine, uncared for by the Almighty but abandoned to the caprices and iniquities of Satan, ye would not be blamed if, yielding to the influence of your own bitter experience, ye believed therein.

But, no; the working men of England require not sophistry, much less metaphysics, to account for the evils which they endure. The causes are too palpable, too glaring, too apparent; and those causes we ourselves have proclaimed and denounced a thousand times, and shall continue to proclaim and denounce so long as there remains the smallest particle of misery in these realms. For the causes thus alluded to exist in our vitiated institutions, and chiefly our aristocracy, with its hereditary titles and its law of primogeniture, its usurpation of all the governmental and administrative powers of the state, its heartless tyranny and its cold-blooded avarice, its voluptuousness and luxury, maintained at the expense of starving millions and wide-spread injustice, its diabolical despotism, and its insatiable rapacity.

But we had almost forgotten that poor family whom we have just seen turned out into the streets, — turned out to beg, or starve.

Carriages, splendid equipages, rolled by; and the poor woman said to herself, in the blackness of her despair, "What have the children of that lady done that they should ride in so fine a coach, while mine are shivering and starving here?"

"Mother," whispered the eldest boy, and he pointed to his little sister, who had sunk down exhausted upon the cold pavement.

"O God, that we were all dead, that we were all dead!"

murmured Mrs. Melmoth, in a low tone, but with a concentrated bitterness such as she had never experienced nor displayed before; and, giving the babe to the eldest boy, she took up the little girl, pressed the poor child to her bosom, and covered her wan, thin face with kisses.

Oh, that was indeed a scene of misery, misery, misery! And here must we leave, for the present, the unfortunate woman with her starving children; yes, leave them there, in the open street, houseless, penniless, foodless, as so many, many thousands of the British working men's families are at all times houseless, penniless, foodless.

CHAPTER XXII

WHO IS THE CULPRIT?

PUNCTUALLY at four o'clock on this day of many and startling incidents, the case of Rose Foster was called on again at the police office in Bow Street; and the young girl once more entered the dock with a firm step. Her countenance was composed, though very pale; but a slight tint of the rose appeared softly on that colourless purity of the lily as she received an encouraging look from Counsellor Sharply as he entered the little box, or pew, on the right hand side of the magistrate. For in that rapid and only just perceptible glance the orphan read a certain satisfaction on the part of the barrister which convinced her that he entertained a good opinion of her case; and thus to a soul already fortified by conscious innocence was the anodyne of hope imparted, — that hope which resembles the dew that falls so gently, so silently, and yet so refreshingly upon the withering, half-blighted flower.

The look which Rose threw timidly around the court showed her that it was as densely crowded as in the earlier part of the day; but two circumstances instantaneously struck her as significant, — for in such a situation the veriest trifle assumes an importance which on ordinary occasions would be totally overlooked. The first was that Arthur Eaton no longer enjoyed the distinction of occupying a seat near the magistrate, but was placed in the body of the court, between the dock and the bench; and the other circumstance above alluded to was that neither Mr. Peter Grumley nor his factotum Mobbs was present.

“What course are you now about to pursue, Mr. Sharply?” inquired the magistrate, by way of reopening the proceedings.

“I purpose to begin by asking the Honourable Mr. Eaton

a few questions," said the learned gentleman, rising from his seat and drawing his gown over his shoulders.

"Do you wish me to enter the witness-box, sir?" demanded Arthur, whose manner was marked by a peculiarity which failed not to strike every one present; for there was a restless glitter in his eyes accompanied by a nervous quivering of the lips and an agitation of the entire being, which, coupled with the mysterious turn that the proceedings had appeared to take at the first examination, began to excite strange and startling suspicions in the minds of the spectators.

"No, sir, I do not wish you to enter this box," said Counsellor Sharply, with that significancy, or, rather, semisarcasm and covert irony in which barristers are so prone to indulge. "You can remain where you are — at least for the present," added the learned gentleman, with a deeper meaning, as he glanced encouragingly at Rose Foster.

But it was almost with a feeling of alarm that the young girl caught this look and comprehended its purport; for, when considered in connection with the mysterious observations in which the counsellor had been indulging, it appeared as if he meant to intimate the probability that Mr. Eaton would speedily change places with herself. And Rose was alarmed, because although she was deeply, deeply anxious that her own innocence should transpire, she was shocked at the thought that he who had appeared as the principal witness against her could possibly be himself the perpetrator of the crime. A film came over her eyes, a dizziness passed through her brain, and a sickness seized upon her heart, for her generous nature experienced the same boundless compassion for Arthur Eaton which he himself had all along felt for her; and moreover, her confidence in human nature was suddenly prostrated by the idea that a young man with so ingenuous a countenance, a brow whereon such noble thoughts seemed impressed, and eyes wherein all lofty emotions might be read, — her soul sank cowering down, we say, with alarm and anguish at the thought that the being created after the image of God was capable of such tremendous hypocrisy.

But this sensation of physical and mental faintness was as evanescent as it was profound; and all the young girl's ideas fell back again into their proper channels and she was recalled completely to herself when Counsellor Sharply began to question the Honourable Arthur Eaton.

"It appeared, sir, by your statement of this morning," said the learned gentleman, "that from the courtyard of the building where the tragedy took place, four passages branch off; and you beheld your female figure dressed in black rush up the passage leading due north. Was it not so?"

"It was so," answered Mr. Eaton, in a tone which appeared alike gloomy and impatient.

"And you heard another witness declare it was on the southern side of the buildings that the prisoner was stopped by himself and others?" said Mr. Sharply, with an interrogative accentuation.

"I heard that point established in evidence," responded Eaton; "and I once more proclaim that I shall be delighted to see the innocence of the young lady in the dock fully established."

"Perhaps you will be gratified, sir," remarked the counsellor, drily and laconically. "Now, sir," he continued, "will you be so kind as to state whether you were always on good terms with your valet, William Dudley?"

"If there be any harm that I might say of the dead," exclaimed Arthur Eaton, indignantly, "I would sooner die myself than reveal it."

This answer produced a breathless amazement throughout the court, astonishing even Counsellor Sharply himself, who, in truth, had merely put one of those haphazard and random questions which barristers so frequently ask, and to which they are far from anticipating any important result.

"Then there is harm which you know and can proclaim in reference to the deceased William Dudley?" said the learned gentleman, fixing his keen, searching eyes upon the young gentleman, who was evidently much pained and agitated by the sudden turn which the proceedings were taking. "Come, sir, let us have a frank, honest, and straightforward answer, if you please," added Mr. Sharply, who was now looking so uncommonly knowing that all the spectators really fancied he had purposely entered upon this particular line of examination, instead of having fallen into it by one of those mere hazards which so often bring the most unexpected fish to the legal net which forensic artifice throws out.

"Your worship, I appeal to you —" began Arthur Eaton, his agitation increasing every moment.

"Sir, you must answer the learned gentleman's questions," responded the magistrate, with a curtness evincing the unfavourable impression already made upon his mind in respect to Eaton.

"Then I at once and emphatically decline to explain any of the antecedents connected with the murdered Dudley," said the young gentleman, suddenly recovering a composure and a firmness which might have arisen from a consummate hardihood as well as from those generous feelings which in reality prompted his conduct; but inasmuch as the true motives which swayed him at the time were totally unknown and of course unsuspected in that court, every one present looked upon him as displaying that dogged defiance and bold-fronted obstinacy with which the perpetrators of enormous crimes so frequently endeavour to arm themselves.

"Remember, Mr. Eaton," said the magistrate, leaning over his desk and speaking in a low but earnest tone to the young gentleman, "remember, Mr. Eaton, the equivocal position in which you stand; and take notice that the fullest and most satisfactory explanation is required at the hands of every one situated as you now are."

"Let Mr. Sharply detail the grounds of those suspicions which he has dared to allege as existing against me," exclaimed Mr. Eaton, in a loud tone and with an air of superb indignation, "and I shall know how to answer him."

"But he has a right to question you, Mr. Eaton, on preliminary matters," observed the magistrate.

"Then, in reference to William Dudley," said the young gentleman, after a few moments' profound reflection, "I will state this much, that some short time ago I had reason, much reason, to be dissatisfied with him; but I pardoned him, and the influence of that forgiveness on my part produced the most salutary results. In a word, William Dudley became a man whom I would have trusted with untold gold; and the proof of my excellent opinion of him may be found in the fact that I had purposed and promised to place him at the head of the institution for which the building where he met his death is intended."

"I must now question you upon another point, Mr. Eaton," said Counsellor Sharply, who was beginning to won-

der why Grumley and Mobbs did not make their appearance. "You have already admitted, in your examination of this morning, that Miss Foster was, so far as you are aware, totally unknown to William Dudley and that you cannot conceive any possible motive which she could have for the crime at present imputed to her. Now, will you please to inform me whether the deceased was connected, in any shape or way, with any woman who might have a motive in causing his death? Any love affair, any vengeance that might seek its bloody gratification —"

"Ah! it is possible," murmured Arthur Eaton, a ray of light darting in unto his soul with the vividness of the electric fluid flashing through a dark chamber; and, pressing his hand to his brow, he remained standing thus for nearly a minute, absorbed in the deepest, most painful thought.

For, all on a sudden, had the suspicion sprung up in his mind that Fernanda, the vindictive, unsparing, merciless Fernanda, might have done the atrocious deed. Hitherto circumstantial evidence had so completely pointed toward Rose Foster, that the young gentleman was compelled, as we have already said, to yield to his convictions, against his inclinations, and believe her guilty. And although the web of testimony surrounding Rose had appeared to spread out and enmesh himself, yet, knowing himself to be innocent, he naturally concluded that the net, despite of all Counsellor Sharply's artful pullings and astute twistings, would close in again upon her whom he painfully and sorrowfully regarded as the true culprit. But now, that second random question thrown out by the barrister, that query which suggested the possibility of another woman having committed the foul deed, produced a sudden and most exciting revulsion in the ideas of the Honourable Arthur Eaton; and he was led to reflect, all in a moment, that it was indeed possible, nay, even probable, that Rose was innocent and that some other female was the assassin. But that other female, who could she be? The answer was readily suggested by a crowd of past circumstances to the young gentleman's imagination; and he saw in a moment that if Rose were not really the murderess, then Fernanda must be.

Quick as a flight of birds sweeps through the ambient air did this train of reflections traverse the mind of Arthur Eaton; and therefore was it that he pressed his hand to his

throbbing brows, therefore was it that for nearly a minute he remained absorbed in profound and painful thought.

"You heard my last question, sir," observed Mr. Counsellor Sharply, who soon grew impatient; "may I request an answer to it? Or shall I repeat it for your behoof? It was whether the deceased William Dudley was known to be connected with any woman in whose breast he might have inspired feelings of a nature calculated to prompt her to the commission of this black crime."

Eaton was about to reveal everything, when it struck him that were he to tear away the veil which covered the past he would be devoting the name of Dudley to infamy and execration, and he would likewise be denouncing Fernanda to the whole world for crimes which he had forgiven, merely because he now suspected her of a new iniquity of which she might prove to be totally guiltless. And if thus denounced, she would be arrested at once, and he must appear against her, and, condemned as a prisoner, she would inevitably perish on the scaffold. Thus even if she should be proved innocent in respect to Dudley's death, the revelation of the reasons which led him to suspect her of that crime would send her all the same to the gibbet; and this was what Eaton would not have happen for worlds. No, because he had seduced her, he had injured her cruelly at the beginning, he had goaded her, as it were, to desperation; because, also, he had pardoned her for what she had done to him, and she was now settled honourably and respectably in the world. These were the reasons wherefore he did not seek, and could never desire, to punish her for the past; and unless he were well assured that she was indeed guilty of a new crime, and this crime of the blackest dye, he would not take any measure that might tend to compromise her. Thus at the very instant when, in reply to Counsellor Sharply's reiterated question, he was about to reveal all those strange and terrible circumstances with which the reader is so well acquainted, a second thought sealed his lips; and he resolved to pause ere he adopted any step, which, if rashly and inconsiderately taken, might involve an unjust accusation against Fernanda for the present, but ruin her beyond all possibility of redemption for the past.

His continued silence, and the effect produced upon his countenance and manner by the conflicting feelings and

bewildering thoughts which had thus swayed him from the moment when Counsellor Sharply first put the question above alluded to, all tended to prejudice him sorely in the eyes of the magistrate and strengthen the suspicions which every one present had already entertained against him.

"Well, I see that I must not hope for any satisfactory replies from this gentleman," said the barrister. "But I will yet ask him one more question," he continued, in a sinister tone; "and that is, how it was likely to happen that William Dudley was murdered with his own knife?"

"With his own knife!" repeated Arthur Eaton, in an amazement which was truly most unfeigned, but which was easily mistaken for the sudden excitement and alarm attendant on the discovery of an incident associated with conscious guilt.

"Yes, with his own knife," reiterated Counsellor Sharply. "May I request your worship to produce and inspect the weapon?"

And while the magistrate was complying with this demand, a silence so breathless pervaded the court that a pin might have been heard to drop. And Rose Foster could hear the palpitations of her own heart as it beat violently and rapidly in the virgin bosom that remained upheaved and motionless with a profound suspense.

"I observe upon the handle of this knife," at length said the magistrate, "the initials W. D."

A murmur of surprise, mingled with the profoundest interest, passed through the court; and nearly all eyes were instantaneously turned upon Rose Foster, as much as to assure her that she would soon be proved innocent. Then those looks were in another moment all centred on Arthur Eaton, who was so amazed by this new incident that he felt as if he were floundering in the mazes of a troubled dream where horror, peril, and wonder were all confusedly blended.

For the inference to be deduced from the circumstance respecting the knife was too clear not to strike him, as well as everybody present. It seemed to show that inasmuch as Dudley was proved by the surgeon to have been murdered, and had not committed suicide, it could only have been some one closely connected with him, or living in the same house, who could have obtained possession of that weapon where-with the murder was accomplished.

"Your worship will please to observe," said Mr. Counsellor Sharply, "that it was upon discovering those initials on the knife this morning that I requested the postponement of the proceedings, and that I likewise wrote upon a slip of paper the demand that Mr. Eaton should be detained until the issue of the adjourned examination. If your worship had not assented to that proposition, I should have at once applied in open court for a warrant against Mr. Eaton."

"You dare not accuse me, sir," exclaimed Arthur, his cheeks flushing with indignation. "I am innocent, nay, I am incapable, utterly incapable of such a crime."

"And I also am innocent," exclaimed Rose, clasping her hands and bursting into tears, for now that she saw the turn the proceedings were so rapidly taking, her emotions of joy for herself and sorrow for Arthur Eaton swelled into a tide that broke down the barrier of her fortitude and found its vent in a flood of copious weeping.

"Compose yourself, my dear child, compose yourself," said a familiar voice; and, raising her head abruptly, Rose found that Mrs. Brace was by her side in the dock.

At this moment Mr. Peter Grumley and his man Mobbs entered the court; and going straight up to Counsellor Sharply, they whispered earnestly with that learned gentleman for a few minutes.

"A presentiment tells me that you will not be many more minutes here," said the milliner, in a low tone of touching tenderness admirably assumed.

Rose cast a glance of deep gratitude upon Mrs. Brace for that assurance; and the milliner, unprincipled and profligate as she was, felt a pang of remorse pass poignantly through her bosom as she remembered all the persecution, misery, and suffering which the poor orphan had experienced at her hands.

"Has anything new transpired?" demanded the magistrate, addressing himself to Mr. Counsellor Sharply, who had just desisted from whispering to the two police constables.

"Yes, your worship, and something of the highest importance," responded the learned gentleman.

Once more did a breathless silence and a sensation of painful suspense pervade the court.

"Proceed with your evidence, Mr. Sharply," said the magistrate.

"I call Peter Grumley to the witness-box," exclaimed the barrister, the expression of whose countenance was most mysteriously knowing.

And Mr. Grumley, having entered the box, was duly sworn to the effect that the evidence he was about to give to the court should be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him God.

When this ceremony was accomplished, a stillness deep as that which follows a terrific rolling of thunder once more reigned in the police office; and inasmuch as the gentlemen of the long robe are amazingly fond of those proceedings the phases of which produce grand effects, Mr. Counsellor Sharply suffered at least a minute to elapse ere he chose to disturb a silence which in reality was characterized by an awe-inspiring solemnity.

At length he drew his gown over his shoulders, and, addressing Peter Grumley, said, "I believe you have been somewhere during the interval of the adjournment which just now took place?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "Leastways me and my man Mobbs has been somevheres."

"And whither have you been?" was the next leading question.

"To Lord Marchmont's House, in Hanover Square," answered Grumley.

"What did you do there?"

"I searched the room which used to be occupied by the deceased William Dudley, and also the chamber belonging to the Honourable Mr. Eaton."

"But I believe you found nothing of any consequence in the former apartment?" said Mr. Sharply.

"No, sir, nothing," was the response.

"And in the latter, that is to say, the bedchamber occupied by the Honourable Mr. Eaton —"

"I found something there, in a chest of drawers —"

"Well, what was it?" demanded Counsellor Sharply.

"This blade of a knife," returned Grumley, producing the object mentioned.

The usher took it and handed it up to the magistrate, who immediately applied it to the knife which lay before

him. It fitted exactly, and was evidently the blade which had been broken off from that knife.

A murmur of astonishment and horror ran through the court; for now that circumstantial evidence pointed to Arthur Eaton as being beyond all possibility of doubt the murderer of William Dudley, the more subdued feelings that were previously attendant on the mere suspicion, became enhanced into a boundless wonder and an immense abhorrence, — wonder that such an ingenuous-looking young man could be so great a criminal, and abhorrence not only at the deed itself, but at the base attempt which had apparently been made to shift the burden and the responsibility of the guilt upon the shoulders of an innocent young girl.

"You are safe, my dear child," whispered the milliner, with a triumphant accent, in the ears of Rose Foster.

"God be thanked!" murmured the orphan, clasping her hands fervently. "But that gentleman — Oh, that such wickedness should exist in the human heart —"

"Hush!" whispered Mrs. Brace; "he is going to speak."

"Your worship will be pleased to hear me for a few moments," said Arthur Eaton, now recovering the faculty of speech which he had lost for nearly a minute when the last overwhelming incident had completed the chain of circumstantial evidence against him.

"I should certainly advise you to reserve your defence, Mr. Eaton," observed the magistrate, with an ominous significance.

"My defence!" ejaculated the young gentleman. "What am I to understand by those words?" he demanded, with mingled hauteur and indignation.

"I will explain myself more fully, sir," said the magistrate, in a stern tone and in a severe manner. "But in the first place, with regard to the young person still standing in the dock, I must declare that the evidence against her has not only totally failed, but that she is entitled to the deepest sympathy for having even for a moment been compelled to endure the anxiety, torture, and ignominy of a position in which she never ought to have been placed."

These words were greeted with an outburst of applause on the part of the spectators; while Rose, overcome by her feelings, fell weeping and sobbing convulsively into the arms of Mrs. Brace.

"I therefore," continued the magistrate, "have unfeigned pleasure in directing Miss Foster to leave the dock; and I assure her that in thus pronouncing her discharge, not a shadow of suspicion remains in my mind concerning her."

"No one is more delighted than myself at this acquittal of the young lady," exclaimed Arthur Eaton, with a generous frankness of manner which of course passed as the rankest and vilest hypocrisy with all present; then, haughtily indifferent to the sneers which curled the lips of those countenances that met his eyes, he added, "And I heartily beg Miss Foster's forgiveness for having in any way been instrumental in causing her the inconvenience, anxiety, and annoyance which she must have suffered."

But Rose heard him not; for, so overcome was she by her own feelings on finding her innocence so fully proven and hearing it so unequivocally proclaimed, that Mrs. Brace was compelled to lead her out of the court into that private room where their former interview of this memorable day had taken place.

"Silence!" exclaimed the usher, the moment the door had closed behind the orphan girl and the milliner.

Arthur Eaton, who had been about to address the magistrate when this summons was made, folded his arms and remained silent; but the air of conscious innocence which he wore was interpreted by the spectators as the hardihood of a desperate criminality aided by a consummate hypocrisy.

"I must now recapitulate," said the magistrate, "certain points in the evidence which has been adduced in this case. In the first instance, Mr. Eaton declared that at the moment when Dudley fell he rushed forward and caught a glimpse of a lady in black darting into a passage opposite. Now this was a passage running due north; and it was completely on the southern side of the building that Miss Foster was immediately afterward captured. The next fact which I must notice is that the deceased was evidently murdered by means of a knife belonging to himself, and of which no stranger was likely to obtain possession. But then comes a still more grave, important, and serious circumstance: for the very blade which belonged to this knife and which was broken off is found in Mr. Eaton's apartment. With such evidence before me, I have only one course to adopt, which is to declare that you, Arthur Eaton, do stand com-

mitted to his Majesty's prison of Newgate to take your trial at the ensuing Sessions, on the charge of murder."

"I can only say to your worship," spoke Eaton, in a firm and resolute voice, "that I am innocent of this foul deed which is imputed to me,—as innocent as I now firmly believe that young girl to be whom you have just discharged from the dock. That a tremendous mass of circumstantial evidence has accumulated against me, I readily admit; but there is a key to the reading of this terrible mystery, a clue to the unravelling of this skein of incidents, at present so tangled and so complicated. That is, however, my secret for the present; useless and unavailing were it to enter upon any explanations at this moment or in this place. No, for a more solemn occasion and a higher tribunal shall be reserved a narrative the details of which will cause every heart to thrill with horror throughout the land, and turn into sympathy and commiseration the loathing and abhorrence which in the meantime may attach unto me. I have now no more to say; your worship has resolved upon committing me for trial, and I am forced to bow to that decision."

Having thus spoken in a firm and manly tone, the Honourable Arthur Eaton resigned himself to the constables who stood ready to lead him away from the police office; and as he traversed the crowd which opened to afford him and the officers room to pass, he was astonished to perceive that those looks which had so recently surveyed him with horror and aversion now contemplated him with a mournful interest and a sorrowful compassion.

"They are already convinced of my innocence," he thought within himself; and, his eyes filling with tears, he threw glances of mute but eloquent gratitude around him.

"Poor fellow!" whispered one individual to another.

"Yes, it is as you say," was the response given by the person thus addressed. "He is decidedly mad."

"A monomaniac."

"And his mania is murder."

These remarks, rapidly exchanged in a low tone, were by no means intended to be overheard by the Honourable Arthur Eaton; they nevertheless met his ears, and, striking with an almost overwhelming violence upon his brain, they

produced a shock which made him reel and stagger as if he were about to fall.

But the constables sustained him with their vigorous arms; and as they hurried him out of the office, the last words that fell upon his ears were, "Poor fellow! he is a monomaniac."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PRIVATE ROOM AT THE POLICE OFFICE

It was some short time before Rose Foster could so far recover her mental composure as to say to herself, "I must now think of what course I ought to adopt." But when she did thus speak with the silent voice of her own soul, she threw her eyes with an instinctive shuddering upon Mrs. Brace, who was seated alone with her in the private room adjoining the public office.

For the young orphan was suddenly reminded by all the reminiscences which swept through her brain that she was more or less indebted to the milliner for the speedy acquittal which had been brought about; and she trembled lest Mrs. Brace, forgetful of the promises made when they were previously alone together in that room, should propose to take her back again home to Pall Mall.

Mrs. Brace perceived the half-terrified, half-appealing look which the orphan had thrown upon her; and she was about to answer in words that glance which spoke so eloquently in its mute significance, when the door opened and Mr. Grumley entered the room.

"Well, ma'am," he exclaimed, in a hoarse bassoon voice, "the young lady has got off, you see. Miss Foster," he continued, "I congratulate you on the result."

"I thank you most cordially for all the sympathy you have shown and the assistance you have afforded me," said Rose, in a tone of fervent gratitude. "But what has been decided in respect to Mr. Eaton?"

"Committed for trial," responded Grumley, in a laconic manner.

"And is it possible that he can be guilty?" exclaimed Rose.

"Can't say," returned the wary constable. "Don't wenter' an opinion, miss, when things seems so wery orkard. You're safe out on it, and that's enough for the present."

Rose was about to make some additional remark when a knock was heard at the door, and Mr. Grumley hastened to answer the summons.

"A gentleman wants to speak to Miss Foster," said Mobbs, who appeared in the passage outside.

"A gentleman — to speak to me!" exclaimed the orphan, overhearing the announcement; then, instantly reflecting that it might be Meagles, of whose treatment at the hands of the government she was totally ignorant, she said, hastily, "I will receive him here, in the presence of —"

And she stopped short as she glanced toward Mrs. Brace; for it suddenly struck her that it was in the milliner's house that Meagles had appeared to deliver her, and he would doubtless be alike astonished and indignant to observe that she was on friendly terms with the woman who had persecuted her.

But all her uneasiness on this point was dissipated in a moment; for instead of beholding Meagles enter the room, as she had expected, she instantly recognized that same tall, thin, pale, but very handsome and interesting young man in whose company she had found herself for a few minutes on a certain occasion, in the waiting-room of the Earl of Desborough's mansion.

Advancing with evident timidity toward Rose, the young man took off his hat, bowed gracefully, and said, "You doubtless have forgotten me, Miss Foster; indeed, I cannot possibly suppose that you remember to have ever met me before —"

And he stopped short, for he perceived the looks of Mrs. Brace fixed angrily and suspiciously upon him. Indeed, this lady recollected perfectly well having seen him before; but where or under what circumstances she could not, for the life of her, call to mind.

As for Mr. Grumley, not being interested in the present scene, he walked to the window, whistling one of the tunes to which he had sung a bacchanalian song at the free-and-easy where he had passed the greater portion of the previous night.

"It would be a ridiculous affectation on my part, sir,"

observed Rose, in reply to the young gentleman's remarks, "were I to declare that I do not remember you."

"Then you recollect that we have met before?" exclaimed the stranger, a perceptible gleam of satisfaction lighting up his pale countenance.

"Yes, for a few minutes, at the Earl of Desborough's," responded Rose; and Mrs. Brace, overhearing what was said, instantly called to mind the fact that it was so.

"Curiosity led me into the court a few minutes ago," continued the young man; "for as I was passing through the street I heard the observations which certain loungers at the door were making upon the proceedings within. I accordingly entered, little suspecting that the young lady of whom the people outside were talking was known even by sight to me. With difficulty I forced my way through the crowd; and at the same moment that I succeeded in obtaining admission to the court, you were leaving it in company with that lady," and the stranger glanced toward Mrs. Brace. "I recognized you instantaneously," he continued, fixing his eyes upon Rose with an expression of tender interest and respectful admiration. "Oh, yes, I knew you again immediately, for since I saw you that day at the Earl of Desborough's, I have thought of you often, very often."

The countenance of the young maiden became suddenly suffused with a deep blush as these words fell upon her ear; and she glanced timidly toward Mrs. Brace to ascertain whether she had overheard that delicate compliment, for such indeed it was, and uttered, too, in a tone so fervid and sincere, but accompanied with a manner so profoundly respectful and timidly deprecating, that even the pure-minded, innocent, and artless Rose Foster could not possibly take offence.

But at the very moment when the maiden thus threw her rapid glance toward Mrs. Brace, Mr. Grumley, turning away from the window, accosted that lady, saying, "P'raps it would be as well, ma'am, if you and me was to have a few minutes' talk together, seeing as how that I must be off almost directly."

Mrs. Brace accordingly rose from the seat which she had occupied near the fire, and hastened to converse apart with Mr. Grumley in the window recess.

"You may conceive, Miss Foster," now resumed the

stranger, drawing nearer to her and speaking in a lower tone than at first, "how surprised, how shocked, how pained I was to behold in you the heroine of this day's sad proceedings. But, no, you cannot conceive what my feelings were, because you are ignorant how deep was the impression you made upon me during the few minutes that we conversed together at Desborough House."

Rose started, surveyed the young man with astonishment for a few moments, and then, casting down her eyes, blushed deeply.

"Oh, do not be offended with me," he said, in so earnest, sincere, and appealing a tone that no measure of resentment could have withstood it. "I would sooner die than cause you pain, for God knows you have this day endured enough. But I was telling you how shocked I was ere now to recognize in the accused Rose Foster that same young lady whose image has ever been present in my memory since first we met at the earl's mansion in Berkeley Square; but that first feeling of anguish on your account was almost instantaneously relieved by the intelligence that you were discharged, and then a burning joy filled my soul when I heard that your innocence had been made manifest beyond all possibility of doubt. Yes, oh, yes, I wept tears of ecstasy and bliss at the issue of that painful ordeal through which you have passed; and I overheard persons near me saying, 'He is perhaps the young lady's brother.' 'No,' replied some one better informed than they; 'Miss Foster is not only an orphan, but has neither brother nor sister, nor any near relation.' Then I thought how happy I should be if I were your brother; for I also am an orphan, and without a single relative in the whole wide world," added the young man, mournfully.

There was something in this announcement which touched the tenderest chord in the heart of Rose Foster; and, raising her eyes, she surveyed the stranger with a look of benevolent feeling and compassionate interest. That avowal which he had just made seemed to establish, as it were, a secret affinity between them; the identity of their orphan positions in the world appeared to place them all in a moment on a footing of friendliness. The barrier of cold reserve was suddenly removed; the diffidence of strangers was annihilated. Those words, "For I also am an orphan,"

were a better, oh, far better introduction on the part of that pale but handsome young man to the poor but lovely maiden than if a duke or a duchess had presented him to her with all the usual forms and ceremonies, hollow words and meaningless obeisances.

"Yes, I thought how happy I should be, were I really able to step forward and claim you as a sister," continued the young man, encouraged by the look of tender interest which Rose had cast upon him; "and while this idea was yet oscillating in my mind, I overheard the same person who had last spoken say, 'Yes, poor girl! she lost her parents under the cruellest circumstances; for I was living next door to them at the time.' Then this individual began to narrate some distressing tale to those near him; while I, unable to restrain my feelings any longer, determined to present myself to you, offer you my congratulations on the triumphant issue of this day's proceedings, and beseech you, Miss Foster, to regard me henceforth as a friend."

These last words were uttered in a low, tremulous tone, and with a certain hesitation of manner; for the stranger was evidently fearful of giving offence to that maiden, whose mind he felt convinced was as pure as her person was beautiful.

"I am deeply, deeply grateful to you for the kind interest which you have shown in my behalf," said Miss Foster, her own voice trembling with emotions profoundly stirred. "But since you are acquainted with my name, permit me to inquire that of one whose friendly conduct of this evening will never be effaced from my memory."

"My name is George Woodfall," was the response, "and I am by profession an artist. But let us now speak of yourself, Miss Foster, for I am determined to act as your friend; and if the identity of orphanage do not give me this right and even impose this duty, then human nature has no ties and society no sympathies beyond mere conventionalities and empty, hollow flatteries. Tell me, then, Miss Foster, tell me whether you have kind friends to take care of you, a happy home to receive you."

"Home! the orphan's home!" murmured the young maiden, her bosom heaving with a profound sigh, approaching almost to a subdued sob, at the same time.

"Oh, then I may yet be enabled to serve you, Miss

Foster," exclaimed George Woodfall, with impassioned ardour alike in his tone and manner; "and I beseech, I implore, I entreat you to look upon me as a friend who would lay down his life to save you a single pang."

"Mr. Woodfall," said Rose, wiping away the tears which had started forth upon her long lashes at the mention of the word "home," — and now, as she fixed her sweet blue eyes upon the young artist's countenance, there was something so melting in their expression and so softly touching in her whole aspect that he felt as if he had known and loved her from their very infancy, — "Mr. Woodfall," she said, "I am totally unable to find words to convey an idea of all the gratitude I feel for this most generous, unexpected, and disinterested behaviour on your part. As candidly as you have spoken to me, so frankly will I answer you; and my answer is," she added, her voice sinking to a low and tremulous whisper, "that I have no friends to take care of me, no home to receive me."

"But that lady?" said Woodfall, casting his eyes toward Mrs. Brace, who was in deep conference with Grumley in the window recess.

"That is Mrs. Brace, the milliner," responded the orphan, again wiping away the tears from her eyes. "I was in her service, but certain circumstances, which I cannot now mention — in fine, I will not return to her establishment."

And she looked shudderingly toward the milliner; for although she had forgiven that woman, although she believed her to be penitent for the past, and although she felt grateful to her for the manner in which she had behaved relative to the proceedings which had just terminated, the young girl nevertheless recoiled from the idea of venturing back again into a house where she had already endured so much, and where she would again be exposed to the persecutions of the Prince of Wales.

"Miss Foster," said George Woodfall, suddenly breaking a silence which had lasted for upwards of a minute, and he looked the maiden full in the face as he spoke, "Miss Foster, can you, will you, dare you trust me? Or is your experience of the world of too bitter a nature to permit you to put any confidence in a stranger?"

"Mr. Woodfall," replied the young girl, firmly, "not for an instant will I return your generosity by the ingratitude

of even leaving you in a state of uncertainty respecting the sentiments with which you have inspired me. Those sentiments are the most implicit confidence in the nobility of your character and the fullest reliance upon your honour. For are we not both orphans?" she demanded, in a tone of the most touching pathos; "and do we not know too well how sorrowful is the lot of orphanage to have the heart to aggravate that woe or enhance that affliction?"

"God forbid that I should be capable of such iniquity!" exclaimed Woodfall, fervently. "You have declared that you can place confidence in me, and I thank you. You have said that you will put reliance upon me, and you shall receive at my hands the respect, the attention, and the protection with which a brother would surround a well-beloved and cherished sister. Know, then, my dear Miss Foster," he continued, "that though a humble artist, I have recently made several friends in the sphere of aristocracy and fashion. Thanks to the patronage of the Earl of Desborough and his amiable countess, the introductions I have received to some noble families open to me the most brilliant prospects," and as Woodfall thus spoke, the warm glow of high aspirations appeared upon his cheeks and poured a flood of light into his intelligent eyes. "But amongst the introductions which I have obtained through the interest of Lord and Lady Desborough," he proceeded, after a few moments' pause, "none has given me greater pleasure than that which has rendered me acquainted with the Marchioness of Bellenden. Have you ever heard of that excellent, generous-hearted, and amiable lady?"

"Yes," replied Rose Foster; "her mansion, which is called the priory, is in the Edgeware Road, at no great distance from the house which I was once enabled to call my home."

"You have heard, then, of the Marchioness of Bellenden," said Woodfall; "and you are therefore well acquainted with the admirable reputation which she bears?"

"My father and mother were wont to speak of her as a lady who did honour to that aristocratic sphere to which she belonged," said Rose, "instead of deriving any honour therefrom."

"And your parents rightly estimated her character," ex-

claimed Woodfall. "Would you, then, accept a home at Bellenden Priory?"

The maiden gave no immediate answer; but she fixed her eyes upon the artist with a mingled expression of reproach and doubt, as if to intimate that it would be cruel of him to trifle with her feelings, and yet that she could scarcely believe him to be capable of such ungenerous conduct.

"Miss Foster, I am serious," he hastened to observe. "Do not wrong me by a suspicion."

"Oh, pardon me, Mr. Woodfall," she exclaimed; "but I feared lest in your anxiety to serve me, you might be overrating your ability, or at least that you fancied others to possess hearts as good and generous as your own, and as willing to afford the friendless orphan a home —"

"The Marchioness of Bellenden will receive you with open arms," interrupted Woodfall, with the solemn seriousness of one who was confident in the assertion he was making. "Your misfortunes will endear you to her; and, moreover, even before I knew your name, which I only learned ere now, I have spoken of you to her ladyship."

"Spoken of me!" exclaimed the orphan, once more throwing upon the artist a look which, if not actually laden with suspicion, was at least mistrustful enough to give him pain.

"Oh, now you doubt me again," he murmured, in a tone of mingled reproach and vexation. "But it is natural; I am a stranger —"

"Once more I beseech you to pardon me," said Rose; and yielding to the impulse of that ingenuous fervour which made her feel that she was but ill-requiting the young man for all his kindness and disinterested attention toward her, she extended her hand, observing, "I was wrong to doubt you, even for a moment; and indeed it was not doubt, but rather amazement and wonder —"

"That I should have ever mentioned you to the marchioness?" exclaimed Woodfall, taking the fair hand of the orphan and pressing it gently in his own. "But have I not already told you that your image has dwelt in my memory since the moment when we first met at the house of Lord Desborough in Berkeley Square? Is it surprising, then, that I should have spoken of you as the fair unknown to a lady who condescends to express an interest in my welfare?"

"Mr. Woodfall," said Rose, casting down her eyes and withdrawing the hand which she had abstractedly suffered to linger in his own for a few moments, "I know not how I could have merited the good opinion which you so generously formed of me —"

"We will not talk upon that subject for the present," interrupted the artist, in a gentle tone. "Time is wearing on; it is already six o'clock," he added, consulting his watch, which was a gift from Lord Desborough, "and you must be anxious to depart from a place which is not calculated to excite the most pleasurable reminiscences."

Rose Foster gave not an immediate reply; but, pressing her hand to her brow, she mentally took a rapid survey of her position. To return to Mrs. Brace's establishment was not to be thought of; to receive money from her was to accept a boon which would give that woman a species of right to visit her at any lodging where she might settle herself. Such a proceeding suited not the views of the orphan, who was anxious to withdraw herself entirely from that channel of existence into which she had blindly and unadvisedly launched herself in the first instance, and which had so nearly hurried her on to destruction. But Meagles and Melmoth — what of them? Were they forgotten by the young girl? No, oh, no; but the former was an unmarried man, at whose hands she could not directly seek protection; and not for a minute would she think of again becoming a burden to the latter. For be it remembered that she was totally unaware of all that had happened to both of them.

What, then, did the orphan decide upon? Not to return to Mrs. Brace's establishment, nor to receive any succour, pecuniary, or otherwise, at her hands. No, nor yet to appeal to Meagles, nor fly for refuge to the poor working man. But she resolved upon trusting to George Woodfall, this new friend whom Providence appeared to have sent her at the moment of a cruelly embarrassing extremity. For the alternative with the poor maiden was to procure a home, an asylum where she would enjoy personal security and mental peace. And this home, was it not now offered to her?

"Miss Foster, you appear to hesitate, you are undecided?" said the artist. "My God! do you still doubt me? Oh, if I did not entertain a true, sincere, and holy interest in your welfare, this utter want of confidence on your part

would prompt me to bid you a sorrowful farewell and retire."

"How often am I destined thus to wound your generous feelings by that semblance of suspicion which my manner so unfortunately assumes?" exclaimed Rose, once more proffering her hand, which the artist took with a joy that he could not conceal; but this joy was mingled with so profound a respect that so far from shocking even the most delicate sensibility, it could only serve as a proof of his honest sincerity.

"Then you accept the proposal which I have made you, Miss Foster?" he said.

"Alas! I have no alternative, poor orphan that I am!" she murmuringly answered, her eyes filling with tears.

"The Marchioness of Bellenden will welcome you as cordially and as warmly as if you were a sister or a daughter," rejoined Woodfall. "And now, if you will say farewell to Mrs. Brace —"

"One word," ejaculated Rose Foster, in a low but hurried whisper, as she glanced almost in affright toward the milliner, who was still conversing with Grumley in the window recess; "I do not wish Mrs. Brace to know whither I am going. This may appear singular to you; but on a future occasion, when we are better acquainted, I will explain my reasons —"

"Never shall I seek to penetrate further into your confidence than you may be willing to admit me," interrupted George Woodfall. "The friendship which I proffer you claims no rights, asserts no privileges, imposes no conditions. It is the friendship, the love, the affection which a brother may offer to a sister."

"And as such do I accept and reciprocate it," answered Rose, profoundly touched by the sense of all that was noble, generous, delicate, and considerate in the language, manner, and conduct of the young artist.

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. BRACE AND MR. PETER GRUMLEY

THE room in which the preceding dialogue had taken place was large though not lofty; and thus, while Rose Foster and George Woodfall were discoursing near the fireplace, nothing that passed between them was overheard by the milliner and the head constable, who were holding their conference in the window recess.

And now let us see what were the topics of conversation with this latter couple.

"Well, ma'am," observed Mr. Grumley, in a low and confidential tone, as Mrs. Brace accompanied him apart into the window recess, "I suppose you ain't very sorry that the present business has come off so well."

"On the contrary," returned the milliner, "I can scarcely restrain my joy. You certainly managed the affair excellently —"

"Indeed, ma'am," interrupted Mr. Peter Grumley, "there was no management in the matter at all. The thing took its regular course, and there was no necessity for me to make use of any artifice or stratagem whatsoever."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, surveying the head constable with the most unaffected astonishment. "The inculcation of Arthur Eaton —"

"Was brought about by the natural course of events, ma'am," rejoined the officer. "Everything went on as smooth as possible; and justice received nothing more than the ordinary amount of help, and certainly not the slightest shadow of hindrance."

"I am totally at a loss what to think or how to understand you, Mr. Grumley," said the milliner. "In the first place, did you not contrive the little incident of the discovery of the

blade of the knife in Mr. Eaton's own apartment at his father's mansion? Did you not contrive this incident, I ask, for the purpose of procuring Miss Foster's immediate acquittal?"

"No such a thing, ma'am!" exclaimed Grumley, with almost an expression of indignation upon his countenance. "I don't do business in that fashion, I can assure you. Besides, how do you suppose that I could procure a broken blade to fit so exactly as the one did that was produced in court just now?"

"Well, well, I perceive that you do not choose to be too communicative, Mr. Grumley," said Mrs. Brace, her arch smile displaying the fine teeth which shone like ivory betwixt the moist coral of her luscious lips. "Keep your own counsel — I shall not attempt to pry into your secrets. All that you undertake you evidently manage so well that those who employ you ought to be satisfied with the results and not seek to ascertain how those consequences have been brought about. I have not forgotten your remark that when the means do not present themselves of their own accord you invent or devise them."

"Yes, ma'am, and so does every long-headed person in this world to a certain extent," observed Grumley, softening in his manner as his libidinous eyes feasted themselves upon the milliner's full bosom, which was much exposed in consequence of the rich scarf being thrown back on account of the heat of the room. "But I see that you don't precisely understand the events of this artemoon," continued Grumley, edging closer toward Mrs. Brace and bending his tall form somewhat so as to be enabled to maintain a confidential kind of whispering in her ear. "The fact is that I was quite sure all along of Miss Foster's innocence, and I knowed that if any one could make it appear, Counsellor Sharply was the man. But I must candidly confess that at fust things seemed to go bad enough against the young lass, till a slight turn took place, when it was proved that she was running off in one direction while the lady in black which Mr. Eaton saw had fled in another. Then, you see, the suspicion instantly arose that Mr. Eaton might have invented his lady in black; and immediately afterward comes the extraordinary affair of the knife with the initials upon it. As a matter of course, Counsellor Sharply seized on them two pints; and he asked

for a remand to enable me and Mobbs to go and make a search at Lord Marchmont's house in Hanover Square. Well, I can't say that I expected to find anything important there, although such-like investigations have at times led to the most extraordinary discoveries. And such did it prove to be in this instance; for, lo and behold! in one of Mr. Eaton's drawers, just underneath his clean shirts, we found that very blade which we produced in court."

"And do you really believe Mr. Eaton to be the murderer?" demanded Mrs. Brace, fixing her eyes keenly upon the constable's countenance.

"Well, I'm not in the habit of giving a hasty or rash opinion," said the officer, in a musing tone; "for don't you see, ma'am, it's a sort of pint of honour with us never to be mistaken in any way or out in our reckoning. If we didn't preserve the character of infallibility—that's the word, ma'am—we should lose all the confidence that's placed in us. So, you perceive, it don't suit us to wentur' an opinion until we're sure that it's the right one. At the same time, I don't mind whispering to you, ma'am, for you're such a wery nice lady, that you could wheedle me out of anything."

"I am really gratified by the compliment, Mr. Grumley," exclaimed Mrs. Brace, laughing. "But you were about to give me your opinion in a confidential manner?" she added, interrogatively.

"And my opinion is, ma'am," rejoined the officer, "that Mr. Eaton will find it precious difficult to convince a jury that he is innocent. But he won't be hung, ma'am,—he won't be hung," added Grumley, looking as solemnly mysterious as a drunken parson trying to seem sober while preaching his sermon; "for this is what will get him off, ma'am, this is what will get him off," and the constable tapped his forehead significantly.

"Ah, I understand you," said Mrs. Brace, really experiencing some degree of interest in this portion of the conversation; for she had not failed to observe, while in court, that Mr. Eaton was a very handsome and prepossessing young man. "He is not to be held accountable for his actions?" she added, inquiringly.

"Just so," responded Grumley.

"And therefore," continued Mrs. Brace, "your opinion is that he committed the murder in a fit of monomania, or, at

all events, while labouring under some aberration of the intellect."

"Well, I suppose that's about the long and short of the matter," said the constable. "You now understand, ma'am, at all events, that the discovery of the blade of the knife was as regular and straightfor'ard a transaction on the part of me and Mobbs as such a thing could possibly be. The truth is that although I'd go a great way to get a person off, no matter whether innocent or guilty, yet I wouldn't for the world play any tricks to shove the load of guilt on to the shoulders that ought not to bear it. In Miss Foster's case, I let things take their natural course, so that I might see what would turn up; and if circumstantial evidence had borne her down altogether, then I should have began to consider how I was to save her. But as her innocence transpired in the regular way, I was not called upon to step out of the usual path. So much for that case; but with respect to t'other."

"Caroline Walters, you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace; then, as a sudden gloom spread over her countenance, she observed, "I cannot, for the life of me, comprehend how you hope to save that unfortunate girl."

"Haven't I promised that she should be saved?" demanded Grumley, in that tone of dogged confidence which men of his class and stamp are so apt to assume when they are impressed with the conviction of their ability to achieve a particular end.

"You have promised, certainly," returned Mrs. Brace; "but —"

"And isn't there another five hundred guineas to be paid over to me, if I succeed?" exclaimed the constable.

"Yes, and the sum shall be forthcoming with as much pleasure as promptitude on my part," rejoined the milliner.

"Then don't be under any apprehension, ma'am," said Grumley. "What I have undertaken to do, I shall perform; and you'll have to pay me over the five hundred yaller boys to-morrow night. But I give you due warning that the evidence is so strong against Caroline Walters, it will be impossible to get her off by fair means."

"I care not how the affair is managed, so that she be rescued from the grasp of justice," exclaimed the milliner. "But why did not her case come on to-day before the Lambeth justices of peace?"

"Because I had the investigation of the affair put into my hands," answered Grumley; "and in consequence of the understanding which was come to with me at Carlton House this morning, I immediately sent one of my underlings over to the Lambeth authorities to let 'em know that Caroline Walters mustn't be brought up till to-morrow, as I expected to have the case completely made out against her by that time."

"Then you have taken an ostensibly hostile attitude toward her?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace.

"How the devil could I do otherwise?" demanded Mr. Grumley. "Ain't I the head officer of Bow Street? And must not people in authority maintain at least a show of consistency and propriety? But don't be alarmed, everything will go on as it ought to do, and the lass shall escape to-morrow evening as sure as I'm standing here."

"And you will give her fifty guineas and tell her to get out of the country as soon as possible," said Mrs. Brace.

"I'll not only give her the money, but also a safe disguise into the bargain," returned the constable. "Lord bless ye, ma'am, I never do things by halves! But what are you going to do with that sweet young gal there?" inquired Mr. Grumley, glancing over his shoulder in the direction of Rose Foster, who was in earnest and whispering discourse with George Woodfall.

"I shall keep my promise and let her go whithersoever she chooses," responded the milliner, who was by no means inclined to run any more risks of exposure and ruin by assisting the designs of the Prince of Wales in respect to the lovely orphan.

"That young chap seems to be getting precious tender toward her," whispered Grumley, again glancing over his shoulder and observing the respectful admiration and soft solicitude with which George Woodfall was contemplating Rose Foster. "P'raps he's making her a hoffer of marriage."

"I wish to Heaven he was," rejoined Mrs. Brace. "He would then take her so completely off my hands that I should not be compelled to furnish her with any of my own hard-earned gold to set her afloat in the world."

"Well, ma'am, I shall say good-bye to you now," observed Mr. Peter Grumley, "and if you'll be at home — and alone — to-morrow night between ten and eleven o'clock, I shall take

the liberty of dropping in to bring you the news about Miss Caroline Walters."

"And receive your remaining five hundred guineas," added Mrs. Brace, with a smile. "You will be welcome, I can assure you."

Mr. Grumley threw upon the milliner a look which seemed to say that she was a very desirable person and had considerably inflamed his passions during the quarter of an hour's chat in the window recess; and Mrs. Brace, penetrating what was passing in his mind, laughed in a low but merry manner at the idea of having captivated the huge, ugly, revolting, shabby-looking fellow who thus dared to regard her with such a libidinous grossness.

Had he been a handsome, dashing young nobleman, with yellow kid gloves and a scented cambric handkerchief, Mrs. Brace would have responded to his lustful glances with looks of piquant archness and voluptuous encouragement; but the sensitiveness of the fashionable milliner could only treat with a good-humoured ridicule the amorous pretensions of one whom she dared not offend by showing herself outraged and shocked at his conduct.

Heaving a profound sigh, Mr. Peter Grumley made a low bow to Mrs. Brace, and stalked out of the room; and the noise of the door closing behind him aroused George Woodfall and Rose Foster from the deep interest of the *tête-à-tête* which had at this moment reached the point specified at the close of the preceding chapter.

"Well, my dear child," said Mrs. Brace, accosting the young orphan with an appearance of so much maternal affability and kindness that George Woodfall could not help wondering at the extreme repugnance which Rose had demonstrated at the idea of returning into the milliner's establishment, "what course have you determined to adopt? And in what manner can I be serviceable to you?"

"This gentleman," said Rose, indicating the artist with a glance, and speaking in a tone of modest decision and maidenly firmness which at once convinced the milliner that some definite plan had been already resolved upon by the orphan girl, even if it were not actually arranged in concert with the young man who stood beside her, "this gentleman," she said, "is Mr. Woodfall, and through his kind, benevolent,

and compassionate aid I expect to find a home at the abode of a lady with whom he is acquainted."

"I am perfectly aware that I have not the least right to demand of you an account of your conduct," said Mrs. Brace, now feeling herself piqued, inasmuch as she saw that the orphan had purposely avoided naming the lady and mentioning the address whereunto she had alluded. "But at the same time," continued the milliner, almost immediately recovering her good humour, "I am overjoyed to hear that your prospects are so agreeable, and I wish you all possible happiness to compensate for the misery you have endured this day."

"Farewell, Mrs. Brace," said Rose, tendering her hand to the milliner. "Once more do I thank you for your kindness in this affair."

"And you will forget the past, dear Rose?" whispered Mrs. Brace, as she stooped forward and kissed her upon the cheek.

"Yes, I have promised to do so, and I will keep my word," responded the orphan.

The milliner then took her departure; and a few minutes afterward George Woodfall and Rose Foster entered a hackney-coach which had been sent for at their request.

A considerable crowd was gathered in the street to catch a glimpse of the charming girl as she came forth from the office, and loud cheers welcomed her as the artist handed her into the vehicle.

The coach drove rapidly away; the multitude dispersed; and while Rose Foster was being conducted to the mansion of the Marchioness of Bellenden, the Honourable Arthur Eaton was entering a solitary cell within the sinister-looking walls of Newgate.

CHAPTER XXV

CAROLINE WALTERS

It was about twenty minutes to one o'clock in the afternoon of the following day that a hackney-coach stopped at the gate of Horsemonger Lane Gaol and two men leaped forth.

These were Mr. Peter Grumley and his factotum Mobbs; and on entering the lobby, they were instantaneously saluted in familiar terms by the turnkey on duty.

"Come for the young 'ooman, eh?" said this functionary, when the usual compliments accompanied by a little chaffing had been exchanged.

"Yes," responded Grumley. "How has she behaved herself, old feller?"

"Silent, reserved, and obstinate," was the answer. "She's a pretty gal, — a deuced pretty gal; but there's moments when the devil looks out of her eyes. I couldn't help surveying her with attention when I went around last night to lock up; and I thought to myself, thinks I, 'Well, I'm blowed if you ain't capable of murdering anybody that stands in your path.'"

"And so she hasn't talked at all, eh?" observed Grumley, interrogatively.

"She hasn't said nothing either bad, good, or indifferent," answered the turnkey. "The matron tried to draw her out yesterday; but it was no go, I understand; and so I suppose she means to see what turn matters may take, before she opens her lips on the subject."

"Well, then, she'll soon have an opportunity of satisfying her curiosity," observed Grumley; "for she'll be committed to-day to a certainty. I've got a precious strong case against her, I can tell you."

"Oh, I s'pose there's no doubt about it," remarked the turnkey, as he opened the inner door of the lobby and ordered some underling to fetch Caroline Walters from her cell.

In a few minutes the young girl made her appearance, in the custody of the underling just alluded to; and, being transferred to the charge of Grumley and Mobbs, she accompanied the officials into the hackney-coach, which immediately drove away.

Caroline Walters was deadlly pale, and, as this pallor showed through the brunette hue of her complexion, it gave a ghastly aspect to her countenance. Her fine dark eyes shone with a restless and sinister light which vibrated as a star; and her pearly teeth were clenched behind the closely compressed lips. There was an awful composure in her manner, which, when considered in respect to her looks, seemed compounded of dark menace against some one and of a fixed and desperate resolution with reference to herself.

The moment the vehicle rolled away from the gate of Horsemonger Lane Prison, Mr. Grumley drew up the window on his side, while Mobbs did the same on the other; and then the head constable addressed himself in a hasty and laconic manner to Caroline.

"Miss Walters," he said, "we have not many minutes to converse together, and we must make the most of so short a time."

"What can you have to say to me?" she demanded, raising her eyes and glancing suspiciously from the ill-looking countenance of Grumley to the repulsive features of Mobbs, for the two constables were seated opposite to her in the vehicle.

"Listen, and don't interrupt me more than you can help, miss," resumed the head officer. "Your case is a very bad one, and you're sure to be committed for trial. If committed for trial, you're sure to be found guilty and hung."

"I already perceive the weight of that circumstantial evidence which will be arrayed against me," answered Caroline, in a low and somewhat thick tone, "and I am prepared for the worst. But I shall at least have the satisfaction of giving a full and complete exposure of the iniquities of the immense brothel over which the arch-procuress Mrs. Brace presides, and which has for so many years helped to sustain the midwifery establishment in Fore Street."

These words were pronounced with a concentrated bitterness of feeling denoting the stern resolution which the young girl had adopted not to die unavenged.

"And, moreover," she added, after a brief pause, "I will proclaim in the presence of the magistrate and the whole court the name of him who seduced me so vilely and abandoned me so cruelly. Oh, I will not pass through the disgrace of the Old Bailey and the hangman, without dragging others through the mire and the filth of public exposure, infamy, and shame."

And now the sinister light which burnt in her eyes flashed forth in those rays which carry a shudder with them through the entire frame that they appear to penetrate and into the depths of the soul to which they seem to pierce.

"Miss Walters," Grumley hastened to observe, "you must renounce your present plans and alter your policy altogether."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the young girl, now surveying the constable with ineffable amazement.

"I mean, Miss Walters, that I am your friend, and that I will save you, if you will permit me to do it," responded Grumley in a rapid tone.

"Save me!" repeated Caroline, clutching with a hysterical joy at the hope which fell thus suddenly upon her soul.

"Yes, save you from the scaffold, miss," answered Grumley. "Now listen one moment. Whether innocent or guilty, you'll find that the evidence will be overwhelming against you, and you will likewise find that it's my own self as will have got up the case so strong against you."

"Then how can you proclaim yourself my friend?" asked Caroline, bitterly.

"Because I am compelled to do my duty as a officer in the eyes of the public," replied Grumley, meeting unflinchingly the searching look which the girl threw upon him; "whereas in private," he added, "I may befriend and serve whomsoever I choose."

"I understand you," said Caroline, her confidence returning. "But wherefore should you feel any interest in me? I am an utter stranger to you."

"True: but Mrs. Brace has enjoined me to do all I can for you."

"Mrs. Brace!" repeated Caroline, in a tone of inde-

scribable disgust. "Ah, yes, I understand, she fears exposure, and she would conciliate me. Is it not so?"

"Never mind the reasons that she may have, miss," exclaimed Grumley. "It is enow for you to know that she has took up your case wery kind indeed, and Counsellor Sharply is engaged to make a fight for you, and I'm resolved to save you, happen what will. But in order that our endeavours may be crowned with success, you must promise to do exactly what I tell you and act precisely as I shall point out."

"And will you guarantee my safety on those conditions?" demanded Caroline, eagerly, for now that a hope was once more excited on her soul, she longed — oh, how eagerly she longed — to live, not only for the sake of live itself, but also for the purposes of her darkly cherished vengeance.

"Miss Walters," said Grumley, in a firm, decisive, and almost arbitrary tone, "you must stick to the path that I am about to chalk out for you, and then I'll guarantee your safety, but not unless."

"Tell me all that I am to do," observed the young girl, "and you shall find me obedient and docile."

"In the first place," resumed Grumley, "you must not be surprised if you see my man Mobbs here get up into the witness-box and say all he possibly can against you, — because that's our wocation. Besides, it's necessary that we should appear rayther bitter against you than too kind, or else we should be suspected of doing on purpose the thing that's to happen arterward, and which mustn't seem to be through any fault of our'n."

"I do not understand you, sir," said Caroline.

"But you will before the day's over, my dear," returned Grumley; "and you will bless your stars that you ever fell in with such a good-hearted creetur' as I am. For I tell you that by nine o'clock this evening you shall be free, at large, in safety, — although things will go precious queer against you presently. But this is what you must do: When all the evidence on the side of the prosecution has been disposed of, and the magistrate asks you what you have to say why you shouldn't be committed for trial, you must at once and emphatically declare your innocence."

"And I am innocent," exclaimed Caroline, with a strange

commingling of hauteur and indignation in her tone and manner.

"That's just the way to say it before the magistrate, miss," observed Grumley, with as much coolness as if it were a mere stage rehearsal. "His worship will then ask you what proof you have to advance, and Counsellor Sharply will probably recommend you to reserve your defence, because the counsellor won't know what my after-plans are. But you must speak out boldly and say that if the magistrate will allow you to visit the house in Fore Street where the murder was committed, you will there show the constable who shall accompany you the most striking and startling proofs of your innocence. Now, can you manage to say all this with a firm and resolute air, — an air that looks like innocence, you know?"

"Assuredly I can," answered Caroline, "and the more so, inasmuch as I am innocent. Oh, my God, I am really and truly innocent, or may I perish this very moment! But proceed: what next am I to do?"

"Leave the rest to me," answered Grumley. "Only do what I have told you, and do it well, and I'll guarantee that you sha'n't sleep in a prison to-night. And what's more," added the head constable, "I am to give you fifty guineas for Mrs. Brace, which amiable lady has took a wery lively interest in your welfare. But mind, not a word about vengeance against the late Mrs. Lindley, nor Mrs. Brace, nor against your seducer. All that kind of palaver will do the cause no good, and may prevent the magistrate from granting the request which you are to make. But here we are at his worship's house."

And as Mr. Peter Grumley uttered these last words, the hackney-coach stopped.

In the times of which we are writing there was no regularly established police court on the Surrey side of the metropolis, and prisoners were accordingly taken to the dwellings of the justices of the peace residing in that district. It was therefore at the private residence of a local magistrate that the present case was to be investigated. But his worship had a large room fitted up with all the miniature conveniences similar to those which on a larger scale characterized the police office in Bow Street. And this room was crowded to excess when Caroline Walters was introduced precisely

as the clock struck one, — the hour which his worship had appointed to take the case, when all the night-charges were disposed of.

Counsellar Sharply was seated in the little pew provided for the accommodation of counsel; and he bestowed a nod of recognition upon Mr. Peter Grumley, as this official escorted Caroline Walters to the dock, the steps of which she mounted with a firmness of tread and of demeanour which produced different impressions on those present. For whereas in every assembly there is a majority of persons who are always inclined to look upon the dark and the evil side of human nature in preference to the bright and the good, so on this occasion did the larger portion of the audience immediately attribute Caroline's manner to the hardihood of a guilt which strove to assume the brazen front of innocence; while the minority of the spectators, who after all were the more humane as well as the better experienced, shook their heads mysteriously and said to themselves, "That young creature is a victim, and not a criminal!"

Rapid but searching was the glance which the prisoner threw around the court to ascertain if there were any familiar faces there; and her looks settled upon the late Mrs. Lindley's two servants, who were seated on a bench together with one of the constables that had taken Caroline into custody on the night of the murder.

And now the examination commenced by the magistrate's clerk inquiring the prisoner's name, age, and profession. To these questions she responded in a firm but respectful tone; and Counsellor Sharply then intimated that he appeared on her behalf.

Mr. Peter Grumley, who had the management of the case, now made a sign for one of the deceased midwife's servants to enter the witness-box; and this female, having been sworn, deposed as follows:

"I have been for twelve years in the service of the late Mrs. Lindley. She was a midwife, and received young ladies who wished to retire into seclusion during the period of their confinement. Miss Walters, the prisoner, became an inmate of the establishment in that manner, a few weeks ago. She was considered a young lady of very extraordinary disposition; and when she was confined, she manifested a great malignity of feeling toward Mrs. Lindley. The surgeon

who was called in to attend upon her remonstrated with her upon the irritability which she showed toward Mrs. Lindley."

Here Caroline, who had kept her eyes fixed upon the floor from the first moment that the witness began speaking, looked suddenly up and exclaimed, "Oh, if I might explain to your worship the reasons which made me hate and abhor that Mrs. Lindley —"

"You shall speak presently," interrupted the magistrate.

Caroline stopped short, and as she glanced her eyes rapidly around, ere she bent them down again, she caught the reproving look which Counsellor Sharply threw upon her, for the learned gentleman was naturally horrified at the immense damage which the prisoner had just inflicted upon her own case by the admission which she had made relative to feelings of hatred and abhorrence in respect to the deceased.

The female servant continued her deposition:

"I believe there was some quarrel or dispute between the deceased and Miss Walters the evening before the one on which the murder took place. For on that evening Mrs. Lindley locked Miss Walters up in her bedchamber; and all next day she was kept a prisoner in her room. I took up her meals, and each time when I went into the chamber I found Miss Walters very much excited, dashing her hand violently against her forehead, and muttering dark threats against Mrs. Lindley and her seducer. But she did not say who her seducer was; neither have I ever heard. It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the murder — that is to say, the evening before last — when I took up Miss Walters's supper to her chamber. I placed the tray upon the table, wished her good night, and quitted the room. I locked the door outside, in obedience to strict orders which I had received from Mrs. Lindley. At a quarter to eleven Mrs. Lindley told me and my fellow servant that we might go up to bed, but that she intended to sit up a little longer. We bade her good night and left her in the parlour. That was the last time I saw her alive. It was about twenty minutes past eleven, when I and my fellow servant, who slept in the same room together, were alarmed by a sudden noise as if something was rushing wildly up the stairs from the bottom of the house to the top. We opened the door and heard the cat mewing and crying in a fearful manner, and

an idea struck us that something was wrong. So we descended the stairs together, and as we passed Caroline Walters's room, we saw that the door was standing wide open. We did not stop to examine how it had been opened, but continued our way down-stairs, when we met Miss Walters rushing away from the parlour as if she was mad. On seeing us, she uttered a dreadful scream and fainted. My fellow servant remained with her, while I went into the parlour; and there I found my poor 'missus' murdered and weltering in her blood. I raised an alarm, constables came, and Caroline Walters was given into custody."

The fellow servant of this witness corroborated all the above details; and the surgeon who had attended Caroline at the period of her miscarriage deposed to the irritability and dislike which the prisoner had manifested on that occasion toward Mrs. Lindley. The same surgeon had examined the body of the murdered woman; and he declared that the fatal blow had been inflicted by a sharp dagger which had penetrated the heart in such a manner that death must have been instantaneous and most probably unaccompanied by even a moan.

We must here observe that Counsellor Sharply cross-examined each of the witnesses with all the skill and tact for which the learned gentleman was so celebrated; but he failed to shake their testimony in any detail.

Mr. Peter Grumley now directed his man Mobbs to enter the witness-box, and that worthy deposed to the following effect:

"I went over to Fore Street yesterday morning soon arter daybreak, in consequence of orders which I received from my superior," and here Mobbs jerked his left-hand thumb over his shoulder toward Grumley. "At the house in Fore Street," he continued, "I examined the chamber which had been occupied by the prisoner, Miss Walters; and I found that the door had been opened by the removal of the lock. In fact the lock, which was inside the door, had been unscrewed and took off as clean as anythink. A knife had evidently been used as a turn-screw."

"This case," said the magistrate, as Mobbs stood down from the witness-box, "should have been heard yesterday; but it stood over until to-day in order to enable the officers to collect all the necessary evidence. Is any further testimony forthcoming?"

"I think, your worship," said Grumley, "that you've heerd quite enough to induce your worship to commit this young gal to take her trial at the sessions."

"Have you anything to urge in behalf of your client, Mr. Sharply?" inquired the magistrate.

"I shall reserve the defence, your worship, until a future occasion," was the learned gentleman's answer.

"Then have you aught to advance, Caroline Walters," demanded the justice of the peace, "wherefore you should not be committed to take your trial on the charge of murder?"

The young girl glanced rapidly toward Grumley, and the equally vivid look of encouragement which she received from him at once dissipated any suspicions which she might have entertained relative to his sincerity, when she saw how strongly and indeed overwhelmingly he had marshalled his array of evidence against her.

"I wish to speak a few words, may it please your worship," she said, in a firm tone. Then, regardless of an impatient ejaculation which broke from Counsellor Sharply, who naturally feared that she was about to crown the damage already done by her imprudence, she cried, in a louder and more resolute, but still musically feminine voice, "For I wish to proclaim to your worship and to all present that I am innocent, yes, innocent as an angel of this black iniquity which is imputed to me. And one word more would I speak — only one word," she continued, while a breathless silence pervaded the officials and the audience; "and that is to explain something which I cannot allow to remain another moment in doubt or mystery. You have heard that I was locked up in my chamber at Mrs. Lindley's house. But it was not so much on account of any quarrel which had taken place, as because I had expressed a desire — nay, even a determination — to quit the establishment; and Mrs. Lindley had locked up my clothes and my purse in her own parlour, with a view to render me the more effectually a prisoner beneath her roof. What course, then, did I adopt? I resolved to fly stealthily; and hence the removal of the lock from the door of my bedchamber, hence my visit to the parlour in order to break open the cupboard where the midwife had concealed my clothes. The rest can be imagined, for you may easily conceive my horror and alarm when,

on entering the parlour, I beheld the ghastly scene which made me fly away with all the speed, trepidation, and anguish of a guilty person."

Caroline Walters paused for a few moments, and the deep silence which reigned in the court remained unbroken.

"But I have declared that I am innocent, and I can prove the truth of my averment," she suddenly exclaimed, the strong emphasis of her words and the abruptness of her manner producing a strange excitement throughout the audience. "Yes, give me the opportunity, and I will undertake to prove my innocence within an hour."

"And what opportunity do you require?" asked the magistrate.

"I demand permission to visit the house where the murder was committed," returned Caroline; "and to the constable who may take charge of me thither will I show such unmistakable evidences that the deed must have been committed by another, that your worship will order me to be discharged at once."

"Can you not sufficiently instruct a constable that he may proceed to the house and obtain the testimony to which you allude?" asked the magistrate.

"No, your worship," replied the young girl, in a resolute tone. "It is absolutely necessary that I should go thither myself."

The magistrate appeared puzzled, and he consulted in whispers with his clerk for a few minutes. At length he turned toward the head constable, saying aloud, "Well, Mr. Grumley, what do you think of this singular application on the part of the prisoner?"

"It isn't for me to express an opinion in your worship's presence," responded the constable, in a deferential manner; "but if your worship chooses to order a remand until to-morrow morning, I sha'n't offer no sort of objection."

"And in the meantime you will take the young woman to the house in Fore Street?" said the magistrate, in a tone of half-inquiry and half-command.

"Your worship's instructions shall be attended to," answered Grumley, dexterously throwing upon the magistrate all the responsibility of the proposed step, though actually encouraging it by his observations.

"Then let the case stand remanded until to-morrow at

eleven o'clock," exclaimed the magistrate, rising from his desk.

"Clear the court!" bawled the usher, and while the spectators poured out of one door, Caroline Walters was conducted through another by Grumley and Mobbs into an adjacent room, where refreshments were set before her.

"You have played your part uncommon well, young miss," said Grumley; "although you did do a little more in the palavering line than I had recommended. But, howsomever, we've gained our pint, and that's the principal. It's now six o'clock," he added, after consulting the huge silver watch which he drew from his fob. "Lord, how time does slip away in them courts, to be sure! But we'll stay here until about half-past eight, under pretence of letting the crowd disperse aforehand; and then we'll slip quietly off, all three of us, to Fore Street. I say, Mobbs, old feller, what time is the boat to be in readiness?"

"At a quarter to nine punctiwal," was the response.

"The boat?" exclaimed Caroline Walters. "Is that intended for my escape? If so, whither do you mean to send me?" she demanded, a vague terror coming over her.

"Don't be alarmed, miss," said Grumley, in a reassuring tone. "A boat certainly enters into our plans as a item of the arrangements; but it will be at your orders, to land you where you like. And now don't ask no more questions at present, but eat some grub and make your mind easy. Come, Mobbs, you and me will just tool a pipe and dip our beaks into this here jug of his worship's ale, until it's time to be jogging."

The two constables accordingly seated themselves near the fire which burned in the grate, and while they smoked their pipes, Caroline Walters fell into a deep reverie upon the past, the present, and the future.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE REVISIT TO THE MIDWIFE'S HOUSE

It was just as the clock at the archbishop's palace in Lambeth was chiming half-past eight, that Mr. Peter Grumley and his man Mobbs led Caroline Walters forth from the back door of the magistrate's dwelling.

The young girl had neither bonnet nor shawl, for those who had hurried her off to prison so peremptorily on the night of the murder had not manifested the consideration or the forethought to provide her with any additional garment to her own clothing; and thus she had nothing but her ordinary apparel to protect her against the night air.

Neither Grumley nor Mobbs now took any notice of this circumstance until they had proceeded some short distance from the dwelling of the justice of the peace; and then, suddenly perceiving that the young girl was shivering with the cold and that her teeth were chattering violently, as she walked between himself and his companion, Grumley exclaimed, "By goles! this is too bad, the poor creatur' is well-nigh starved."

"Why didn't she eat the bread and cheese that his worship ordered to be given her?" growled Mobbs, for Caroline had refused to partake of any refreshment at the magistrate's abode. 81

"I don't mean that kind of starvation, you cussed fool," exclaimed Mr. Grumley. "I mean she's starved with cold."

"Oh, never mind, never mind," said the young girl, crossing her arms over her bosom. "We shall soon be there, and then I can procure some warmer apparel."

"Well, come along, then," observed Grumley, quickening his pace, and making Caroline take his arm, he led her

along at a rate which soon imparted a healthier circulation to her blood.

In ten minutes they reached Fore Street, and the door of the well-known house was opened by one of the servants who had borne evidence against Caroline at the examination.

"Ah, and so you are come here, to the house which you have made one of mourning, miss," said the menial, in a bitter tone, the instant that the light which she held in her hand threw its rays upon the countenance of Caroline.

"Silence, woman, I am innocent," ejaculated the young girl, in a tone which made the servant feel that it might really be the truth which was thus solemnly and emphatically averred.

"Yes, silence, and let's do our work without bickering or ill words," said Mr. Grumley. "Come now, shut the front door, that's right. Which room is it that you want to go to, miss?" he demanded, addressing the question to Caroline Walters.

"Say your own," whispered Mobbs in her ear, the servant not catching the hint thus hastily conveyed.

"My own," accordingly exclaimed Caroline; "and I wish to be alone with the constables," she added of her own accord.

"Good," whispered Mobbs.

"Well, then, come along," said Mr. Grumley. "Here, young 'ooman, lend us your candle," he added, as he took the light from the servant's hand. "Which is the parlour where the old lady is laid out?"

"In there," answered Mobbs, pointing to the door opening from the passage, where this conversation took place. "But I don't suppose you want to see her?"

"Not I, indeed," responded Grumley. "Come, Miss Walters, you lead the way, if you please, and me and my man will follow."

Caroline accordingly ascended the stairs, which appeared to creak ominously beneath her feet and those of the two men behind her; and the atmosphere of the house seemed laden with that thick, fetid, nauseating smell which so frequently denotes the presence of a corpse. It even appeared that the very walls felt clammy as her hands touched them while she was thus ascending the staircase.

And all was silent throughout the dwelling, — all save

the sounds of the footsteps of the young girl and the two constables, for the females who were lodging in the establishment at the time of the murder had sought other asylums the very morning after the terrible catastrophe.

In a few minutes Caroline Walters reached the chamber which had so lately been her own, and the two constables followed her into the room, Mobbs closing the door behind him.

"Now what is to be done?" demanded Caroline, goaded by suspense to a pitch of intolerable impatience respecting the safety and the escape which had been promised her.

"Don't be afraid, miss," said Grumley; "all will be right in a moment. Look out, Mobbs!"

And Mobbs, noiselessly opening the window, thrust his head forth.

The night was very dark, and the Thames gurgled as its full tide swept rapidly on beneath that open casement.

A vague terror once more came upon Caroline Walters, and her startled looks wandered rapidly from Mobbs, who was still leaning out of the window, to Peter Grumley, who was standing in the middle of the chamber with the candle in his hand.

"It's all right," observed Mobbs, suddenly drawing in his head and turning away from the window. "The boat is about ten or a dozen yards distant."

"The boat again," ejaculated Caroline; and she threw a terrified glance at the open casement.

"Now, young lady," said Grumley, suddenly speaking in a rapid and decisive tone, "the moment for your escape is come. Don't you see what you have done already, and what you have still got to do? You have inveigled me and my partner here on pretence of producing some proof of your innocence, and while him and me is looking another way, you opens that window softly but speedily, and you jumps clean out into the Thames."

"Oh, horror!" exclaimed Caroline, clasping her hands entreatingly; "would you murder me?"

"Don't be silly, gal," said Grumley, in a tone which instantly recalled her to herself. "Well, you jumps out, I was observing, and me and Mobbs haven't time to save you. To-morrow all London will believe that you preferred suicide by drowning to death on the scaffold by the hand of

Jack Ketch. But no one, save and except just them few as is concerned in the business, will suspect that there was a boat a-waiting in readiness close underneath this window, and that the people in the said boat picked you up and rowed away with you in a jiffy. Neither will it be imagined that in this selfsame boat there was a disguise, not only in the shape of garments, but also for staining the complexion — ”

“ Ah, now I understand you, Mr. Grumley, and I thank you, my God! I thank you most sincerely,” exclaimed Caroline, taking the constable’s hand and pressing it as warmly and as fervently as if she had just found a father in that man.

“ Well, well, miss, I hope you’ll be happy, and that you’ll take care and not be caught, that’s all,” said the head constable. “ But, by the bye, here’s the fifty guineas which Mrs. Brace sent you.”

“ Keep them for yourself,” said Caroline, gently repulsing the bag which the officer endeavoured to force upon her.

“ No, not I, miss, thank’ee all the same,” he said. “ I’m both just and honest after my own fashion, and I’m well paid for all this business.”

“ Not for worlds would I receive that money, since it comes from Mrs. Brace!” exclaimed Caroline, in a tone which was decisive. “ And now, farewell.”

“ Farewell, and good luck to you, miss,” said Grumley, while Mobbs echoed the sentiment.

Then Caroline Walters approached the window and threw a piercing, penetrating glance into the deep obscurity which hung like a mist upon the river. But she caught a glimpse of the boat, — she could even see the upturned countenance of some one watching the casement, — and, confident that it was all as Grumley had assured her, she leaped upon the window-sill; then, holding her breath tightly to suppress any ejaculation that might rise to her tongue, she sprang courageously forth.

There was a tremendous splash, and this was followed by the sound of oars; but Grumley and Mobbs waited to hear no more, and, flinging open the door, they rushed from the room, exclaiming in voices which simulated extreme terror to perfection, “ She has drowned herself! She has drowned herself! ”

CHAPTER XXVII

BELLENDEN PRIORY

WE must now shift the scenes for a short space, in order to introduce our readers to that mansion where, as George Woodfall so confidently predicted, Rose Foster experienced a cordial welcome and immediately found a home.

At the period of which we are writing, Bellenden Priory was one of the most remarkable features of interest at the West End of the metropolis, — not only in an architectural point of view, but likewise on account of its great antiquity. It stood a little way retired from the western side of the Edgware Road, from which thoroughfare the garden was separated and indeed concealed by a high wall fronted with flintstones. In the middle of this rude and rugged boundary there was a Gothic portico containing a massive gate studded with large nails, and a bell-pull of thick iron wire, with a deer's foot for a handle, appeared on one side of this solemn-looking entrance.

Within the boundary there was a large garden laid out in so tasteful a manner as to afford a striking relief, with its modern characteristics, to the mediæval style of the spacious building which stood in the midst; and on a small piece of water surrounded by picturesque grottoes a couple of stately swans and several aquatic birds from foreign climes floated about.

The priory itself was a large, rambling edifice, exhibiting in its different parts various kinds of architecture, according to the ages in which additions had been made to the structure. The front was comparatively modern, three stories high, and with tall but narrow casements, each one opening on a stone balcony filled with evergreen plants. The principal entrance consisted of oaken folding doors standing beneath a portico,

which was reached by an ascent of a dozen steps; and the marble hall within was surrounded by suits of armour and marble statues. The parapet of the façade was battlemented, and at each angle there was a low spire of slate-work.

This frontage looked toward the Edgeware Road; but the southern side of the priory was the most ancient, and had preserved its monastic appearance, with its massive walls, long and deeply set windows, low doors, and high pointed roofs. The northern side was only two stories high and was somewhat in the Elizabethan style of architecture; and the western portion of the priory was a confused jumble of old towers and wooden outhouses, a portion of a cloister, and a spacious stabling.

Such a large, rambling, and ill-connected edifice had necessarily several doors opening into the grounds, and likewise many passages and staircases within. But the interior was very handsomely fitted up, and all the rooms in the front part of the building were furnished in as modern a style as good taste could possibly render consistent with the architectural peculiarities of windows, cornices, chimney-pieces, and recesses. Thus the priory was a mansion where elegance and splendour combined to ensure the existence of every comfort and luxury, without completely destroying the effect produced upon the eye and the imagination by the solemn grandeur of the structure itself.

Such was Bellenden Priory, the foundation-stone of which was said to have been laid in the reign of Richard I, — that well-meaning but mistaken fanatic who was the cause of millions of lives being lost on the plains of Palestine. From the earliest date of its existence, the priory had belonged to the Bellenden family, which was even more ancient still, for the genealogical tree traced its descent from one of the Norman ruffians who came over with William the Conqueror.

But although the priory had remained for so many centuries in the hands of the Bellendens, an intermarriage with the equally ancient family of Montgomery had by some means or other given rise to litigation respecting the ownership of the mansion and the annexed estate; and these lawsuits had commenced about thirty years previously to the date of our tale. There were likewise estates in Warwickshire which

had belonged to the Bellendens from generation to generation; but which were even more perilously involved than the priory property, on account of the claims of the Montgomery family. Touching these matters, however, we shall have to treat more in detail hereafter; for the present we must speak of the Marchioness of Bellenden, the present owner of the priory.

This lady was now in her thirty-seventh year, and was famed for her beauty, her accomplishments, and her benevolence. A glance at her early history is necessary for the purposes of our tale. She belonged to the Montgomery family, and becoming an orphan at a tender age, was left to the care of an aunt, who, being a mercenary and intriguing woman, resolved to ensure her niece a brilliant position by means of a "good marriage." Thus, scarcely had she attained her seventeenth year, when the innocent, artless, and beautiful Laura was commanded to receive the addresses of the Marquis of Bellenden, an old man in his sixty-second winter. Then there was a sad and even terrible scene between the orphan Laura and her aunt the Dowager-Countess Montgomery; and although there were no witnesses to that scene, it was nevertheless rumoured at the time that Laura had thrown herself at her aunt's feet and had confessed that her affections were already engaged. But whatever were the reasons that Laura urged against the marriage proposed on her behalf, certain it is that the Dowager-Countess Montgomery was inexorable; and it was represented to the unhappy Laura that family reasons required the tremendous sacrifice at her hands, inasmuch as the litigation which had then been in progress about ten years would be amicably settled by this second intermarriage of the two families. In short, Laura was dragged, as it were, to the altar; and the young creature of seventeen became the wife of the old nobleman of sixty-two. The honeymoon (such a honeymoon as it must have been!) was passed at the Bellenden estate in Warwickshire; and then the marquis brought home his bride to the priory. But he did not long survive this most unequal alliance into which he had forced his youthful victim; and his death took place with a suddenness which seemed to savour of a just retribution for his cruelty in blighting all the best and purest affections of her young heart. The family physician pronounced his death

to have arisen from apoplexy; and the remains of the last lord of Bellenden were removed with grand funereal pomp into Warwickshire, to be interred in the family vault at the old church where all his ancestors had been laid in due succession.

The death of the Marquis of Bellenden without male issue instantaneously revived the lawsuits respecting the heritage of the estates. The marchioness, however, kept possession; and her opponents were the male members of the Montgomery family from which she herself was sprung. Vainly did her aunt, the dowager-countess, endeavour to induce her niece to come to an amicable settlement: the young widow was resolute in her refusal, for she felt that she had been basely sacrificed in the most important event of a woman's life, and she would therefore show no favour to those who had thus made her the victim of a selfishness which did not, however, obtain its ends. Time passed on, years rolled by, and the lawsuit dragged its slow length along in that tremendous tribunal of modern inquisition, the Court of Chancery. The Dowager-Countess Montgomery soon grew wearied of making overtures to her niece, or else was too proud to reiterate them; and thus at the period when we introduce the Marchioness of Bellenden to our readers, she had been a widow twenty years, she was still in possession of the priory and the Warwickshire estates, the old dowager was still alive, and the lawsuit appeared as far off from a settlement as ever.

Yes, the Marchioness of Bellenden was now thirty-seven; and never once during her long widowhood of twenty years had she laid aside her mourning apparel. The tenacity with which she clung to it was most singular, most remarkable, most unaccountable. That she thus permanently regretted the sexagenarian who had been her husband for a few months, she herself did not for a moment pretend; in fact, as she had never loved him, and had been chained to him against her inclination and despite of her most fervent prayers to the contrary, she could not possibly have ever regretted him at all. Nor did any measure of respect for his memory furnish a hypothesis to solve the mystery of this perseverance in maintaining the weeds of a widow; and therefore was the circumstance evidently a secret belonging to herself, and to herself alone.

Wealthy, handsome, highly accomplished, and of a reputation unsullied by even the slightest breath of scandal, the Marchioness of Bellenden had, as a matter of course, received many offers of marriage during her long widowhood; but she had refused them each and all, though some were of a nature so eligible as to have appeared beyond the possibility of experiencing a negative. And on those occasions, when thus pressed for a decision in so delicate and important a matter as an invitation to change her condition once more, she would glance significantly but not hypocritically down at her mourning garb, and observe with a singular and almost martyred air of resolution that she had determined to carry those weeds throughout her earthly career, unto the threshold of the grave itself.

In personal appearance the Marchioness of Bellenden was a woman who could not fail to create a feeling of interest even in the mind of the most callous observer of the female sex. She was tall, well-formed, slightly inclining to embonpoint, but characterized by so much elegance and grace that every attitude and every movement had its own peculiar charm. Her bust was of full and voluptuous proportions, the slope of her shoulders was admirable, and her arms, though robust, were exquisitely symmetrical and dazzlingly white. But the high corsage and the long sleeves veiled the superb neck and the polished arms; yet the beauty of the throat and the faultless formation of the snowy hands, aided also by the shape which the black dress took from the rich contours of the bosom, allowed ample scope for the exercise of delicious imaginings in respect to the charms thus modestly concealed.

The countenance of the Marchioness of Bellenden was very handsome, and its beauty was so well preserved that, despite even of the widow's weeds which certainly have a tendency to mar the appearance of youthfulness, she did not seem to be more than thirty. Her eyes were large and of a soft liquid blue; her hair, which she wore in bands and did not permit the close fitting cap altogether to conceal, was of a dark chestnut, not particularly luxuriant, but with a gloss shining on its surface as the lustre of a lamp displays the richness of velvet; her teeth were white as ivory and faultlessly even; and there was a vermilion freshness upon the lips which must inevitably have made the admirer of the sex

think within himself how great was the pity if no tender kisses were ever more to be gathered there.

The manners of the Marchioness of Bellenden were not too elegant to be cordial, not too fashionably refined to be winning. Elegant and refined they assuredly were, but not with that glacial formality, chilling reserve, and ceremonial haughtiness which seems to calculate the distance between individuals with a view to decide what amount of civility may be vouchsafed or how much cold constraint is to be assumed. No, Lady Bellenden knew full well how to manifest that graceful condescension which made her inferiors feel at their ease in her presence; while to her equals she exhibited an affability and amiability which, though always, as it were, showing through a certain settled melancholy alike of expression and manner, nevertheless endeared her to all her friends and acquaintances.

Such was the Marchioness of Bellenden, the lady to whose care George Woodfall introduced the orphan Rose Foster.

And, as he had foretold, cordial, most cordial was the welcome which the much-persecuted girl experienced at the hands of the benevolent lady. An elegant chamber was assigned to Rose on the southern side of the priory; and when she awoke on the following morning a milliner with a quantity of ready-made apparel was introduced into her presence. New and excellent raiment for the orphan's immediate use was thus provided; and the dressmaker had the orders of the marchioness to take Miss Foster's commands for the completion of everything that was necessary for her toilet.

In the afternoon George Woodfall called at the priory to pay his respects to the marchioness and inquire concerning the health of Rose, and her ladyship insisted that he should stay to dinner. Thus at the time that poor Caroline Walters was undergoing the examination before the Lambeth magistrate, Rose Foster was conversing with the marchioness and the young artist in one of the elegantly furnished parlours of Bellenden Priory.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE AMOROUS CONSTABLE

THE clocks at the West End were striking eleven when Mr. Peter Grumley and his man Mobbs stopped at the door of Mrs. Brace's establishment in Pall Mall.

"Now I shall say good night to you, old feller," observed the head constable to his factotum, "'cause I promised to call and let Mrs. Brace know that the young gal had succeeded in escaping. And besides," added Mr. Grumley, lowering his voice to a significant whisper, "she's a uncommon pleasant lady is Mrs. Brace, and I sha'n't mind a spending half an hour or so with her."

"Well, I wish you luck, Mr. Grumley," said Mobbs. "We shall meet in the mornin' at the office. Good night, sir."

"Good night," repeated Grumley, as he knocked at Mrs. Brace's door, while Mobbs hurried away to his own abode.

The summons of the head constable was almost immediately answered by the discreet lady's-maid, Harriet; and he was forthwith ushered into the parlour where the milliner was anxiously awaiting his arrival.

Harriet withdrew, and the moment the door closed behind her, Mrs. Brace demanded, in a quick tone, "What news? Have you succeeded?"

"Everythink as right as a trivet, ma'am," was the prompt reply; for Mr. Grumley saw that the lady was labouring under considerable suspense.

"Caroline is at liberty?" she exclaimed.

"As free as you and me, ma'am," rejoined the head constable; "and as safe too, if so be she has made proper use of the disguise which was provided for her."

"Which she has no doubt done," observed Mrs. Brace, from whose mind a tremendous weight had been suddenly

taken by the welcome intelligence received from the constable. "But pray be seated, and help yourself to whatever you fancy," she observed, pointing toward a chair and glancing at the table on which there were decanters of wine and the spirit-stand.

"Thank'ee, ma'am," said Grumley; "and with your permission I'll mix myself a glass of hot brandy and water, just to take the chill out of my stomach."

"Do so," returned Mrs. Brace; "and tell me all that has occurred to-day."

"The thing has been managed as nice as possible," said Mr. Grumley, after having taken two or three experimental sips at the grog which he had just brewed; and smacking his lips in unalloyed approval of the beverage, he continued thus: "I all along knowed the evidence was so dead against her that it would be impossible to get her off by fair means, and I told you as much yesterday evening at Bow Street. So I had a plan cut and dried to save her by stratagem. In short, I resolved that she should ask the magistrate to let her visit the house in Fore Street for the purpose of procuring testimony to prove her innocence; and, when once there, I was determined that she should either jump out of the winder of her own accord, or else I meant to put her out."

"Good God!" ejaculated the milliner, trembling all over and gasping for breath; "you do not mean to say — that is — you would not have me believe that — that you — murdered her?"

"There wasn't no necessity for that, ma'am," answered Grumley. "The winder, as p'raps you know, looks on the Thames, and my plan was to have a boat in readiness to pick the young gal up, and a disguise in the boat for her to assume without delay."

"And was this extraordinary plan realized?" demanded Mrs. Brace, shuddering as she fancied she beheld the unfortunate girl, Caroline Walters, struggling in the waters of the rapid stream.

"Realized, and with triumphant success, as they say upon the playbills," answered Grumley. "Miss Walters jumped out as courageous as a diver and as light as a cat, and the boat picked her up in a moment. Then me and my man Mobbs rushed out of the room, raised an alarm, and pretended to be quite distracted at the hawful occurrence. We

got a wherry as soon as we could, made the boatmen pull us up and down along the shore, but of course couldn't discover any trace of the young lady, and so we pretended to give up the search in despair."

"And the impression will be that she was drowned?" said Mrs. Brace, interrogatively.

"Just so, my dear madam," replied Grumley, throwing an amorous look on the milliner as he drank his brandy and water. "The newspapers will have a long and pathetic account of the business; and, in fact, it all looks natural enow. A young gal driven to desperation, sees that she is sure to be committed for trial; if committed, knows that she will be found guilty; if found guilty, is well convinced that she'll be hung; and so, to prewent all these unpleasantnesses, hits upon the ingenious trick of getting herself taken to Fore Street, where she's well aware that the means of suicide is within her reach — 'cause why, the river rolls under the window. There it is all in a nutshell, and a wery pathetic, romantic, and affecting history it makes."

"But will you not be compromised?" asked Mrs. Brace.

"Not a atom," returned Grumley, with a sly laugh. "I took all my measures too well to leave the door open for any suspicion against me. When I went to fetch the young gal away from the prison, a little before one to-day, I remarked to the turnkey, in a careless, offhand way, that she was sure to be committed, as I had got up a precious strong case against her. So he wouldn't think that I was at all friendly disposed toward her. Then I really did produce an overwhelming force of testimony against her; and I myself was the fust to ask the magistrate to commit her, before he himself or his clerk had uttered an opinion on the subject. Again, when Miss Walters requested permission to visit the house in Fore Street, I wouldn't appear to help her at all in the matter; on the contrary, I managed to throw all the responsibility of the proceedings on the justice of the peace himself. In short, I played my cards so well, ma'am, that I can't possibly be blamed."

"Not for allowing her to escape from your custody?" said Mrs. Brace.

"To be sure not," ejaculated Grumley. "Suppose, now, that me and my man Mobbs had let her run away from us while we were taking her to the house in Fore Street, then

indeed the world might have said that we were either bribed or that we showed a most unpardonable negligence. But when once we got the girl in safety into the house, who could have supposed that she would suddenly open a casement and fling herself into the Thames below? Don't you see the difference, ma'am?" and as Mr. Grumley asked this question he winked his eye knowingly.

"I now comprehend the full meaning and force of your precaution," observed the milliner. "And during the examination before the magistrate, was anything said at all calculated to compromise —"

"You or your establishment, ma'am?" exclaimed Grumley, who, perceiving that the lady hesitated, finished the sentence for her. "Not a word, not a syllable, I can assure you. In fact, I put a stop to all that, my dear madam, when I was taking the young gal along to the magistrate's house."

"Ah! then she did threaten?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, inquiringly; for she was anxious to learn how far the revelations of Caroline Walters might have extended.

"Well, she did threaten a many things, ma'am," said Mr. Grumley, surveying the milliner with looks so full of unmistakable grossness that she began to be not only disgusted but likewise alarmed. "It ain't, however, of no use waxing yourself on that account, my dear creatur'," added the constable.

"Oh, no, not at all," ejaculated Mrs. Brace. "But I will now hand you over the remaining moiety of the promised reward," she observed, starting from her seat.

And as she crossed the room to open the writing-desk, which stood on a side-table, Mr. Grumley followed her with his eyes; and the rustling of her silk dress, the glimpse which he caught of her robust but well-turned ankles and her very genteelly shaped feet, the gleaming of her white neck and arms in the lamplight, and the coquettish French cap so admirably becoming the milliner's style of beauty, — all these produced an indescribable effect upon Mr. Grumley's sensations, and his blood, inflamed alike by lust and potent liquor, appeared to boil in his veins.

The milliner took from her writing-desk a number of bank-notes, and when she returned to her seat she was more profoundly struck and more seriously alarmed than at first by the singular expression of countenance with which Mr. Grum-

ley regarded her; and although she was well experienced in all the looks and glances which constitute an index to the strong, fiery, or libidinous passions of the soul, yet her pride would scarcely permit her to believe that the coarse, vulgar, ill-favoured, and sordidly apparelled police-constable could possibly aspire to any tender concession on her part.

"Here is your money, Mr. Grumley," she said, affecting a pleasant but patronizing smile. Then, the more firmly to impress upon his mind the fact that she regarded him as an inferior whom she was paying for his hireling services, she observed, "You have really well earned the amount, and I have every reason to be satisfied with your conduct. I could not possibly have employed a better agent in the matter."

"I'm glad you're satisfied, my dear creatur'," returned the constable, squeezing her hand as he took the bank-notes which she gave him, and accompanying that evidence of his admiration by a look of amorous grossness.

Mrs. Brace drew back her hand rapidly, and assumed so severe an expression of countenance that Mr. Peter Grumley could not help observing that she was offended; but he only laughed, and then proceeded to count the bank-notes with a businesslike deliberation.

"Right as a trivet," he exclaimed, when this methodical task was accomplished; and, securing the money about his person, he fixed his eyes long and earnestly on the milliner's countenance. "You're a wery handsome woman, a wery handsome woman," he repeated, "and I don't know when I've been so much excited by any lady's personal appearance. In fact, I feel all over nohow, ma'am, and that's God's truth."

"Mr. Grumley, I am surprised at you," said the milliner, her cheeks becoming scarlet. "But you cannot mean anything save a joke," she exclaimed, instantaneously recovering her presence of mind and forcing herself to smile.

"By goles! I never was less inclined to joke in all my life, my dear creatur'," cried Mr. Grumley. "There seems to be a wery devil in my heart and hell-fire in my blood, prompting me to do anythink desperate, so as —"

"What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed the milliner, starting from her seat in alarm; for the eyes of the constable appeared to devour her with their looks of burning lust.

"I mean, my dear beautiful creatur'," said Grumley, also

quitting his chair and extending his arms toward her, "that I must and will have a kiss, even if I die for it."

And before Mrs. Brace could offer any resistance or even give utterance to a word of remonstrance, she was locked in the rude embrace of the herculean constable, and his coarse mouth was fastened to her own luscious lips.

"Now will you leave me?" she said, in a rapid and excited tone, as he at length relinquished his hold upon her; and, trembling all over with rage and with a countenance that showed its deadly pallor even through the soft tint of rouge that was wont to render her cheeks so captivating with its roseate bloom, she clung to the mantelpiece for support.

"Leave you! No, by Heaven, I won't leave you till to-morrow morning," exclaimed Grumley, maddened with the contact of the milliner's lips, the sweets of which he had just enjoyed, and longing once more to feel the warm pressure of her glowing bosom against his chest.

"This is an insolence, unsupportable, intolerable," gasped Mrs. Brace, her eyes actually becoming haggard with mingled alarm and horror as she read upon the countenance of the officer all the ferocity of those passions which were raging in his soul. Then all on a sudden, she extended her hand, with frantic desperation, toward the bell-pull.

But Grumley, anticipating the movement, once more caught her in his arms; and, in spite of her desperate struggles, for she feared to alarm the whole house by shrieking for help, he succeeded in imprinting a dozen kisses upon her lips, that were now parched with rage, and on her cheeks, that were burning from the same emotion.

Almost annihilated by the intolerable disgust arising from these odious caresses, and by the terrible apprehensions which the rabid lasciviousness of the monster's manner and looks excited in her brain, the milliner sank, breathless and exhausted, upon a seat.

"Now, listen to me," said the constable, speaking with the hot breath and parched tongue of a brutal lust. "I've taken a fancy to you, and I'm determined to gratify my whim. I know you ain't overparticular yourself, and I also know that a strange man's sleeping in your house won't be any unusual thing. So, let us have no palaver —"

"Ah!" ejaculated the miserable Mrs. Brace, her tongue unlocking through the very poignancy of her despair; "that

ungrateful Caroline Walters has vilified me and my establishment — I see it all."

"Well, she did tell me a few plain truths, my dear creatur'," observed Grumley; "but not more than I had guessed beforehand. For the instant that you made me go with you to the prince, and when I found that his Royal Highness was so very much interested in you and so anxious that them young gals should be got off, oh! oh! thought I to myself —"

"Enough! enough!" cried Mrs. Brace, in a tone of almost abject entreaty. "Tell me what sum of money you now require to induce you to leave me at once."

"Lord bless your dear heart," returned Mr. Grumley, "what a mercenary son of a gun you must take me to be! But I should be ashamed to receive another suverin at your hands, whereas I do mean to help myself to no end of kisses."

"Dare not approach me again, or I will alarm the house," said Mrs. Brace, in a hoarse, thick, and rapid tone, while her hands were clenched until the nails of her fingers almost penetrated the plump white flesh.

"My dear angel, a chap as is accustomed to grapple with thieves and the most desperatest waggabones isn't likely to be afear'd of a pretty woman's anger," said Grumley. "So let us have no more nonsense; it's only delaying pleasure, and my resolution's fixed to pass the night with you —"

"Good God! is it possible?" moaned Mrs. Brace, sinking back in her chair.

But ere another word was spoken, the door opened hastily, and Harriet, the lady's-maid, entered the room.

"What is the matter?" demanded the milliner, instantaneously recalled to herself by the sudden and almost precipitate appearance of her faithful abigail.

"A person wishes to see you, ma'am — nay, insists upon forcing herself into your presence," replied Harriet. "She will take no refusal."

"But who is she?" asked Mrs. Brace, relieved from the first dreadful fear that it was her husband who thus demanded an audience.

"That woman, you know, ma'am, who came here one morning and sent up a letter, when you were engaged with Lord Florimel, ma'am — you remember," added the lady's-maid, speaking with hesitation on account of Grumley.

"Here I am to answer for myself," said a voice just out-

side the door; and immediately afterward a young woman, dressed with great plainness, entered the room.

"The Gallows' Widow, by goles!" exclaimed Grumley, springing toward her.

An ejaculation of mingled surprise and terror burst from the lips of Elizabeth Marks, for she it indeed was; and she made a desperate effort to break from the grasp which the constable had fixed upon her.

But wrenching around her arm with a violence that made her sink almost upon her knees, he said, in a savage tone, "Be quiet, or I'll do you a mischief."

And the woman, completely overpowered, attempted no further resistance.

CHAPTER XXIX

A COMPROMISE

MRS. Brace had not failed to recognize Elizabeth Marks the instant her looks fell upon the pale but far from ill-favoured countenance of that woman whom she knew to be her husband's mistress. And here we should observe that the Gallows' Widow was not attired in her wonted apparel of mourning weeds; for she had laid aside that too distinctive dress ever since she became notoriously implicated in the affair of Joe Warren's escape from Newgate. Nevertheless, it was easy to recognize her, now that the dark veil which she wore to conceal her countenance was lifted from those pale features; and thus a mortal terror was carried to the soul of Mrs. Brace at the very same instant that Peter Grumley pounced upon the Gallows' Widow and made her his prisoner.

For the milliner now perceived at a glance all the variety and menacing nature of those difficulties which had suddenly sprung up around her. Elizabeth Marks knew that her real name was Warren, and that she was, in sooth, the wife of the redoubtable Magsman; and these facts she might blurt forth in the presence of Grumley. Nay, more, she might even proclaim Mrs. Brace's complicity in the escape of the Magsman from Newgate; and thus the reputation, the honour, and even the personal safety of the unhappy milliner would be so completely in the power of the Bow Street officer that she would not dare return a negative to any favour he might ask of a tender nature, or any extortion he might practise in a pecuniary point of view.

Nor did Mr. Grumley fail to observe the stupor of consternation which seized upon Mrs. Brace the moment her eyes encountered the Gallows' Widow; and even if he had not noticed any such emotion on the part of the milliner, he

could not have failed, from the mere fact of the visit of such a woman as Elizabeth Marks, to draw inferences by no means favourable to her private character.

"Well, this is a most extraordinary interruption to a wery pleasant little conversation which you and me, ma'am, was having together," said the Bow Street officer, winking his eye with a half-amorous and half-malicious significancy at Mrs. Brace.

"Of what offence is this young woman accused?" demanded the milliner, summoning to her aid all her mental courage and firmness.

"It's well knowed, ma'am," replied the constable, still retaining his hold upon the prisoner, "that she's long been in connection with a desperate set of fellows; and there's three or four things I can bring for'ard against her. But I don't want to be too hard upon her, and so I shall only accuse her of having aided and abetted in the escape of one Joe Warren from Newgate —"

"He picks out that offence, ma'am," interrupted the Gallows' Widow, darting a look of mingled hatred and contempt upon the constable, "because there's a reward of fifty guineas offered for the apprehension of the woman who intimidated and overawed the household of old Shrubsole, the picture-dealer, on the night when Joseph Warren performed the feat that has made his name as famous as Jack Sheppard's. And that woman for whom fifty guineas are offered —"

"Is yourself, Lizzy Marks," exclaimed Grumley; "and so you need not attempt to deny it."

"On the contrary, I glory in it," rejoined the Gallows' Widow. "But take care of yourself, Mr. Grumley. It will prove in the long run an evil day for you when you began to make war upon the band to which I belong."

"We shall see all about that, my dear," observed the constable, in a tone of self-satisfaction. "Come, now, let us be off."

"Mrs. Brace," exclaimed the Gallows' Widow, "pay this fellow fifty guineas, and he will let me go."

"Not I, indeed!" ejaculated Grumley.

"Yes, but you will, though," returned Elizabeth Marks. "Mrs. Brace, you know that I can speak out about certain things if I like —"

"Silence, woman!" ejaculated the milliner, in a tone that was rather hysterically sharp than imperiously prompt. "Mr. Grumley," she immediately said, turning toward the constable, "I should wish to avoid the scandal that will be entailed upon my establishment by the exposure of the fact that this woman was arrested while paying a visit to me. At the same time," added Mrs. Brace, "I would not have you think that I am in any way intimidated —"

"Well, well," exclaimed the constable, perceiving the smile of mingled malice and triumph which slowly wreathed the lips of the Gallows' Widow, "I see that it would be unpleasant if the world was to know that Elizabeth Marks, alias the Gallows' Widow, was on such familiar terms of intimacy with Mrs. Brace, the fashionable dressmaker of Pall Mall, that she could introduce herself at all hours into her friend's presence."

The milliner listened in dismay to this speech, which the constable delivered in a measured and significant tone; for it was as much as to intimate that he, Peter Grumley, had now got her, the fashionable milliner, completely into his power. And Elizabeth Marks, whose natural keenness enabled her to perceive that some compromise was about to be suggested by the Bow Street officer in her behalf, chuckled with that species of low, inward laugh which invariably sounded ominous and made the blood run cold, no matter on whose ears it fell.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Grumley, after a brief pause during which he watched with satisfaction the effect that his previous speech had produced upon the milliner, "it would be unpleasant for the world to know that the Gallows' Widow was on such intimate terms in Pall Mall; and the magistrate might even think it necessary to send for Mrs. Brace and demand explanations on that point."

"Enough, enough, Mr. Grumley," ejaculated the wretched milliner. "Name the conditions upon which you will suffer this woman to take her departure."

"And you will comply with 'em?" demanded the officer, interrogatively.

"She will not dare refuse," said the Gallows' Widow, in that quiet tone which actually imparted to the observation more weight and a deeper meaning than if it had been uttered with ejaculatory excitement.

"Speak, sir, be quick, and let us put an end to this scene," said Mrs. Brace, trembling all over and speaking in a voice that was painfully agitated, despite the desperate efforts which she made to preserve her self-possession; but every look which was darted upon her by either Grumley or the Gallows' Widow, and every word which fell from their mouths, carried with a more poignant intensity to the soul of the miserable woman the harrowing conviction that she was utterly and totally in the power of both.

"Madam," observed Elizabeth Marks, again speaking in her quiet manner, "it is very evident from what Mr. Grumley has said that he is disposed to assent to a compromise on my behalf, and therefore any delay which arises will be caused only by you."

"That's true enough," exclaimed the Bow Street officer. "And now for the conditions that I have to propose."

"Speak!" ejaculated Mrs. Brace, with a nervous irritability which showed how tensely her feelings were strung.

"In the first place," said Grumley, "you will pay me, ma'am, the fifty guineas which I lose by letting this young 'ooman escape me."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the milliner. "What next?"

"And you will consent," rejoined the constable, "to the little favour I was asking you just at the very moment when the servant came into the room to announce the Gallows' Widow."

The lascivious twinkling of Grumley's eyes and the blush of indignation and shame which all in a moment overspread the countenance of Mrs. Brace revealed to the keen perception and far-sighted experience of Elizabeth Marks the nature of the favour to which allusion had just been made; and the expression of mingled satire, malicious glee, and subdued astonishment which instantaneously appeared upon the woman's pale features, struck the milliner in her turn, making her aware that the Gallows' Widow had penetrated into the nature of the constable's pretensions.

"My God!" almost screamed forth the wretched milliner, her feelings now goaded to the verge of desperation, "would that I were dead — dead!"

And she repeated the word with a frightful emphasis.

"Compose yourself, madam," said Elizabeth Marks, with

characteristic coolness. "You cannot now accuse Mr. Grumley of protracting this unpleasant scene."

"Let us put an end to it at once," exclaimed Mrs. Brace, now speaking with the firmness of one who has suddenly taken a desperate resolution. "Mr. Grumley, I agree to the conditions."

"Capital!" ejaculated the officer; and he released the hold which throughout this scene he had retained upon his captive.

"I thank you, madam, for having purchased my freedom," said the Gallows' Widow, but speaking in a tone of quiet and subdued satire instead of gratitude. "The business which brought me here to-night is of no great importance. I merely wanted a little money; but as you have so generously undertaken to pay the fifty guineas to this cormorant constable, I shall not ask you for any more, especially as, in your anxiety to serve me, you have agreed to another condition which, I see full well, is by no means palatable. However," added Elizabeth Marks, suffering the irony of her tone to become more apparent, "when the fashionable, exquisite, and elegant milliner of Pall Mall contemptuously designated me as 'that woman,' she did not foresee how fully and completely she herself was destined to be humiliated in the presence of the very female whom she thus scorned, loathed, and despised. Farewell, madam, and may you pass a pleasant night."

With these words the Gallows' Widow quitted the room, her low, chuckling laugh sounding with a species of sepulchral omen upon the ears of Mrs. Brace, who, already crushed and overwhelmed by the withering satire which had been levelled at her, sank half-fainting into the nearest chair.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GLASS OF LIQUEUR

TEN minutes had elapsed since the departure of the Gallows' Widow, and a profound silence reigned throughout the milliner's establishment in Pall Mall.

The door of the parlour was now opened cautiously, and Mrs. Brace came forth, holding a light in her hand, and followed by Peter Grumley.

The countenance of the unhappy woman was of a ghastly pallor, which, as before stated, showed through the roseate tint which art had shed upon her cheeks; but in the settled frown stamped on her forehead, the corrugated brows, the fixed stare of the eyes, the compressed lips, and the upheaved, motionless bosom, there was evinced a sternness of purpose which would have filled the constable's mind with terrible misgivings had not his brain become confused with a large potation of brandy wherein he had indulged immediately after the departure of the Gallows' Widow. His countenance was therefore flushed, his eyes were blood-shot, and his lips were wreathed into a vacant smile of drunken satisfaction and tipsy triumph, his appearance thus presenting a remarkable contrast with that of the determined and desperate woman who now conducted him as cautiously as she could up the staircase to her own bedchamber.

But the carpeted stairs creaked beneath the heavy and uneven steps of the constable, and his bulky form occasionally reeled against the balustrade, thereby producing a cracking sound in the woodwork; and in rapid, low, but severe, nay, almost savage whispers, did Mrs. Brace enjoin him to be careful how he alarmed and aroused the entire household.

At length the chamber was reached, and Mr. Peter Grumley

was introduced into that temple of voluptuousness whither the milliner was wont at times to admit her favoured elect.

Throwing himself upon a chair, the constable cast his eyes around the chamber, every feature of which he surveyed with that semi-vacancy which characterizes the looks of a man who has taken a drop too much; but when his eyes settled upon the downy bed, with its linen of snowy whiteness and its pillows soft and luxurious even to the view, all the fury of his animal passions rekindled with consuming ardour.

Rising from his seat, he caught the milliner in his arms, and, straining her in his uncouth embrace, he pressed his parched and heated lips to her own. Then, resuming the chair, he forced her to sit upon his knees.

"You are uncommon handsome, my dear," he murmured, in a voice rendered more than naturally thick and hoarse by the desires which were devouring him; "and I knowed you wouldn't play the cruel when once we came to a good understanding together."

"You seem to be thirsty, your lips are dry, your tongue is parched," said Mrs. Brace, who had thus far abandoned herself to the odious toyings of the constable because it suited her purpose to appear thus docile, calm, and resigned.

"Well, I am athirst," he responded, rolling his feverish tongue over his cracking lips.

"I have wine, spirits, and liqueurs in that cupboard," said the milliner, gently disengaging herself from his arms and rearranging the corsage of her dress.

"You're exceedin' kind, my dear," observed Grumley, fixing upon her his looks of the grossest, most brutal lasciviousness. "Suppose you give me a little wine and water fust, to quench this terrible thirst; and then I'll take a sip of — what d'ye call them last things you spoke of?"

"Liqueurs," responded the milliner, whose manner was glacial and passionless as her tone was cold and meaningless.

"Here are curaçoa, noyau, golden water, and Dantzic brandy."

"Well, my dear, I leave it all to you to choose me a glass of the best of them stuffs," returned the constable, "for I can't say as how I ever tasted any of them. So let us have the wine and water fust, the what-d'ye-call-it next, and then to bed in a jiffy."

Mrs. Brace opened the cupboard and speedily mixed a tumbler of sherry and cold water, which she handed to the constable. She then returned to the cupboard, where she remained for nearly a minute; and, on accosting Grumley again, she held in her hand a small glass filled with noyau, the almond flavour of which was diffused through the chamber.

"How beautiful that smells!" exclaimed Mr. Grumley, placing upon a table the tumbler which he had drained and receiving the liqueur-glass from the milliner's plump white hand.

"Noyau always has the perfume of almonds," she observed; and her lips, which were now ashy white, quivered slightly.

"Your health, my love," said the constable, raising his eyes and the glass at the same time.

"I am your slave for this night, according to agreement," returned the milliner, taking off her coquettish French cap.

"You look handsomer than ever," exclaimed the constable. "Once more, my love, here's to your health."

And Peter Grumley tossed the noyau down his capacious throat.

But during the instant that elapsed while his countenance was thus upturned and the glass was at his lips, he caught a glimpse of the features of Mrs. Brace, and it struck him that an expression of fiendish malignity and diabolical triumph had suddenly sprung up thereon.

This thought was as rapid as the lightning is vivid; and it was the last which ever flashed through the brain of the Bow Street officer.

For even as the liqueur was gliding with its luscious smoothness and oily richness down his throat, the glass fell from his hand, a strong spasm shot through his whole frame, and life was already extinct as he toppled for a moment on his chair ere he rolled a heavy corpse upon the carpet.

For nearly a minute did Mrs. Brace stand gazing upon the body of that man whom she had thus sacrificed to her feelings of abhorrence in respect to the present and of terror with regard to the future; for it was not so much to escape his loathsome embraces of this night that she had murdered him, as to save herself from becoming his victim at every

hour and at every moment when it might suit his fantasy and please his lustful inclinations thereafter.

Yes, for nearly a minute did she gaze upon the form which was so lately endowed with a robust and vigorous health, and which now lay like a mere bundle of clothes at her feet. No, not exactly like anything so little calculated to inspire emotions of terror; for the ghastly countenance of death, was it not there?

Oh, yes; and now an awful consternation began to grow upon the wretched woman, and the clock of St. James's Church suddenly struck one, as if to remind her with that solemn sound, and at that solemn hour, that she was alone in her chamber with the corpse of her murdered victim.

Then, oh, then, how bitterly, deeply, profoundly did she repent of the act which she had perpetrated, — not so much on account of the enormity of the crime itself, but because it appeared to have suddenly raised up in her path a thousand embarrassments of a magnitude which she could not see any possibility of surmounting. Oh, better, better far would it have been, she now thought, to surrender herself to the loathsome embraces of the wretch, and even incur every chance and every risk of having to prostitute herself to him in the same way wherever it should suit his caprice and his fancy for the future. Yes, better were it to have become the slave of his beastly lusts and the victim of his odious passions altogether, rather than to have taken the one tremendous step which could not be recalled, and which in a moment, as it were, placed her within view of the black and looming scaffold.

Such were her reflections, but, great Heaven! how useless now! For there, at her feet, on the carpet of her own bed-chamber, lay the corpse of the murdered man.

For an instant she thought of committing suicide; but her soul sickened at the idea of self-destruction. And yet the means were ready at hand, for there was still left a large dose of Prussic acid in that phial whence she had poured a few drops into the fatal glass of noyau. Yes, the means were ready, the inclination even prompted, but the courage was wanting to complete all the elements necessary for the appalling tragedy of suicide.

And yet what was to be done? The corpse was there, and it must be disposed of. But where could it be concealed?

where buried? And was Mrs. Brace able to adopt any decisive step without assistance? No, it was impossible; and the wretched woman, seating herself upon a chair, covered her face with her hands and gave way to all the bitterness of her harrowing reflections.

Alone with a corpse! This was the appalling conviction that was uppermost in her mind. In a few minutes she felt a cold shudder, a glacial tremor, stealing over her; and it struck her disordered fancy that some terrible phantom had risen slowly and noiselessly up before her and was gazing upon her with its dull, glassy, lustreless eyes. Then she abruptly removed her hands from her countenance; and her looks, wild with apprehension, were cast swiftly around the room, settling irresistibly at length upon the corpse that lay stretched on the floor.

The murderess started to her feet. Was she the sport of some horrible vision, the victim of some hideous nightmare, or was it really true that she had killed a human being, and that the corpse was there, at her feet? Once more she carried her hands to her head, but it was not this time to cover her face; no, it was to press her fingers to her throbbing brows and thereby steady her thoughts, if possible. For her brain, oh, it reeled, it reeled; and those thoughts, oh, they whirled, they whirled; and it seemed as if her scalp had been torn off and some demon was pouring molten lead upon the palpitating, seething, quivering cerebral mass. Just Heaven! her punishment had already begun on earth, and the red right arm of God was already stretched out to avenge that foul and atrocious murder.

Alone with the corpse of her victim! Oh, this was the conviction that hemmed her in with an adamant wall, and imbued with its own harrowing influence all the thoughts which swept through her brain and all the emotions which rolled their tidal fury through her breast. Was it possible that she could have been so mad, so insane, so rabid, so foolish, as to perpetrate a deed which thus conjured up a myriad perils to environ her, as if with a host of insatiate demons panting for her destruction, her ruin, her blood? But, hark! what sound was that which made her start so convulsively? Was it a guttural moan from the throat of the corpse at her feet? Was it the wail of the restless spirit which had only been parted a few minutes from its mortal

tenement? Or was it the voice of some unearthly being responding in mockery or in sympathy to that tremendous eloquence of silent anguish and noiseless despair which filled the heart of the murderess? She listened, all was still, a profound tranquillity reigned throughout the house; and in her own chamber it was indeed the stupendous silence of death.

Her imagination, then, had deceived her, and no sound had in reality reached her ears. But this stillness, this silence, oh, it was now becoming intolerable. It was something which began to weigh upon her heart like lead, it was not a mere absence of sound, it was the presence of an influence too mysterious to describe and too tremendous to endure. Oh, it seemed as if everything were now sepulchral that met her eyes in the yellow lustre of the night-lamp. She looked toward the bed; its snowy whiteness appalled her, for it appeared as if she were gazing on her own winding-sheet. She turned her eyes toward the windows; the drapery seemed to have a dark, funereal gloom. Her looks dwelt for an instant on a tall, narrow clothes-press of dark mahogany, and her fevered fancy represented it as an upright case containing skeletons. Once more her eyes turned wildly toward the casement, and there were they riveted with dread horror; for it appeared to the appalled imagination of the unhappy woman that between the opening of the window-curtains she beheld the marble countenance of a corpse looking in upon her. For nearly a minute did Mrs. Brace maintain her eyes fixed, in awful consternation, upon that phantom of her brain's creation; and all the while her tongue was locked as if by paralysis, and her limbs were deprived of motion, and she was like a statue that could feel! But at length her terror reached that point when she must either scream out or avert her eyes, and it was this latter species of relief which she was enabled to grant unto her own agonizing soul. And then, oh, horror! as she suddenly and shudderingly withdrew her looks from the ideal face of the dead at the window, they fell upon the real one which seemed to gaze up at her with its fixed and stony eyes as the corpse lay stretched upon the carpet.

A moan of indescribable anguish now burst from the lips of the wretched woman; and once more did she cover her countenance with her hands, to shut out the appalling object

from her view. But during the few moments that she thus veiled her physical vision, her feverish fancy acquired ten thousand times more activity than ever, and her imagination conjured up myriads of frightful shapes and terrific forms to harrow her with all the dread phantasmagoria of the grave. Then, unable to endure this exquisite refinement of torture, she opened her eyes again, and again did they irresistibly settle upon the face of that corpse with which she was thus alone.

Goaded almost to madness, feeling that her senses were abandoning her, and yet not daring to fly from the room nor to summon assistance, the miserable woman once more caught eagerly at the idea of suicide which flashed back into her heated brain; and, rushing to the cupboard, she was about to seize upon the phial of Prussic acid, when her unquiet conscience made her fling a startled glance to her right and to her left as she was about to commit this new crime. And then, with an ineffable aggravation of all the horror which previously filled her soul, did she suddenly become transfixed to the spot, while her entire frame grew all in a moment paralyzed and petrified; for the furtive look which she had thrown around was arrested once again by the phantom face that her disordered imagination depicted as gazing in upon her through the window.

So strong was the delusion that during the minute which elapsed while Mrs. Brace was thus held in statue-like thralldom, unable to stir a limb, unable to give utterance to a sound, unable also to withdraw her eyes from that object of terrible attraction, during this minute of an appalling fascination, we say, her mind exercised an activity and an inventiveness which only added to the horrors of her thoughts and enhanced the poignancy of her mental excruciation. For the face which thus seemed to be looking in upon her took all the ghastly lineaments of the grave: its flesh was of that yellowish white which marks the corpse, its eyes were fixed with stony, lustreless, and yet not altogether inexpressive glare, its black brows were strongly pencilled above the deep cavernous sockets wherein the glassy orbs were set, and the lips were thin and of a bluish pallor. All these characteristics did the horror-stricken woman behold, or, rather, fancy that she beheld; for the entire portraiture, with its supernal vividness, was nothing more than the

offspring of her own disordered fancy. But at length, unable any longer to endure the contemplation of an object which to her had all the appearance and produced all the effects of the sternest reality, she burst, as it were, from the moral tetanus which held her spellbound; and, clapping her hands frantically to her throbbing brows, she gave utterance to a hollow moan and sank upon the carpet.

CHAPTER XXXI

A NIGHT WITH A MURDERED MAN

THE lamp which stood upon the table immediately began to grow dim, as if a mist were perceptibly rising around it. Steadily did that dimness increase every moment, until the light was subdued down into the faint glimmer of a distant star, and then it expired altogether, leaving the chamber involved in the blackest darkness.

And upon the floor the milliner was stretched, under the influence of an irresistible rigidity which retained her spell-bound from the hair of her head to the soles of her feet. An appalling consternation was upon her, and yet she could not move a muscle nor give vent to a sound. Her mouth was fast closed as with lockjaw; and the same dreadful species of tetanus held all her limbs in its iron prisonage, leaving to every fibre and tendon the acuteness of feeling and to every sense its peculiar faculty, but suspending all motion, and reducing the woman to the condition of an animated statue.

Yes, but a statue animated with a vitality as fresh and a perception as vivid as if not a single function nor physical power were held in abeyance; and thus everything which might happen to the miserable being while in this state was certain to be characterized by a tremendous aggravation of concomitant feeling. Complete and effectual as was the physical restraint, so acute and keen was the moral perception; and the moment Mrs. Brace became aware that she was reduced to this awful position, she likewise found herself enveloped in a darkness so pitchy that it seemed to be a black mist filling the atmosphere with its stifling density.

All that had passed during the earlier portion of the night she recollected well; and slowly, nay, even methodically, did she revolve in her memory the various incidents which

had so terribly marked those hours. At length she reached, as it were, the end of her reflections, that appalling term reminding her that she was now alone in the room with the corpse of the murdered man.

Yes, upon this tremendous truth did her thoughts settle; and she said within herself, "The dead body lies upon the same carpet where I am stretched. It is only a few feet distant, and if I could stretch out my arm I should touch it with my hand. But Heaven forbid that I should seek thus to come in contact with it, even were I able to move a member or a limb. And, oh, horror! if the corpse itself were to extend its arm —"

The wretched milliner stopped short in her reflections, which had suddenly become too soul-harrowing to permit a continuance; and over her entire frame, so rigid and statue-like, a glacial shudder passed. But it was not she who moved convulsively beneath the influence of this shudder; no, it was the icy tremor which rolled slowly over her, with the clammy sensation produced by the contact of a loathsome snake.

Entombed, as it were, in the midst of that stupendous darkness, stretched helpless, motionless, and voiceless upon the carpet, with all her powers of perception, feeling, and endurance more vividly awake and more acutely susceptible than ever she had known them before, and having upon her mind the astounding conviction that within a few feet of her there was the corpse of the man whom she herself had murdered, was not such a position enough to deprive the miserable woman of reason and blast her intellect with the searing lightning of madness all in a moment?

But, no, it was not within the range of her destiny that she should experience relief even in the dark mazes of mental aberration; and thus the weight of consternation crushed not at one moment, and the poignancy of anguish rent not reason's powers at another, although tremendous indeed was the trial to which the strength of the woman's intellect was put by those rapid and torturing alternations.

How long she had lain in that position, she knew not; what hour of the night it was, she could not surmise. Nor was she able to form the least conjecture as to the cause which held her thus spellbound. She was not circled by cords nor chains; for, if she were, she would feel the bonds upon

her person, and, moreover, she would be at least enabled to move her limbs somewhat. But not a hair's breadth could she stir them, not a hair's breadth could she turn her head either to the right or to the left. And what was more wondrous still, her eyes were wide open, and the lids did not wink.

The tetanus was thus complete; but whence did it arise? Was it from some infernal spell, some diabolical incantation, or was it the forewarning of the awful visitation of God's wrath upon her? These conjectures were as bewildering as their nature was soul-harrowing; and every instant was laden with thoughts the anguish of which was sufficient to expand throughout a whole century of existence and fill it with an unceasing woe.

Again and again did the miserable woman reflect that she was alone in that chamber with the corpse of the murdered man; and again and again did she think within herself that if the same miraculous and incomprehensible power which had reduced her to so helpless a condition of thralldom should inspire that dead body with the motion, the power, and the will to harm or to terrify her, she must lie still and endure that crowning horror, for not a finger could she raise in her defence, not a sound could she articulate to summon assistance.

For the fiftieth time these excruciating reflections passed athwart the milliner's imagination, as if a long iron wire armed with a myriad little sharp blades were dragged slowly through her brain, cutting its ferocious way amidst the very quick of the vital mass; yes, for the fiftieth time had she endured the crucifixion of those lancinating thoughts, when a church clock proclaimed the hour of three.

Thrice spoke the iron tongue of time, and the sound carried the cold sensation of the tomb to the heart of the milliner. She knew not why it was, but the announcement of that hour appeared pregnant with awful omen to the mind of that miserable woman. More dread, more solemn, more sepulchral than before was the stillness which succeeded the striking of the clock; it was the profound tranquillity of the grave, the stupendous silence of the tomb.

But, oh, horror! what sound is that which now reaches the ears of Mrs. Brace and carries an ice-bolt to her heart? It is the rustling of a garment, the slight, faint, and scarcely

audible noise produced by a human being slowly turning upon a carpet. And that sound came from within a few feet of the horror-stricken woman, ay, from the very direction in which the corpse lay.

To say that she listened with breathless attention were to inspire the idea that she had power over her respiration; whereas, this faculty had remained miraculously suspended from the instant that the tetanus commenced, her bosom never rising or sinking once the whole time, but resting stationary and pulseless like the bust of a marble statue. Had not the breath, however, been thus suspended under the influence of the miraculous trance, it would assuredly have become so, and the blood would have turned to ice in the milliner's veins as that rustling sound stole gradually, gradually, gradually upon her ears.

Conceive that woman chained, as it were, to the ground by the invisible and impalpable but not less adamantine bonds of a tremendous torpor which locked up the physical powers only, and left the moral perceptions to acquire a more poignant keenness from this total release of their allegiance to the substantial being; conceive her, we say, thus lying stretched upon her back as powerless and as helpless as if she were made of stone, and yet alive, oh, God knows how painfully, acutely alive to every circumstance and every influence in any way affecting her; conceive her in this appalling position, with the harrowing conviction slowly, steadily, and surely stealing into her soul that the corpse of the murdered man was not only moving, but was actually creeping toward her.

Talk of the horrors of churchyards by night, talk of the hideous spectres which throng over the grave of the suicide in the cross-road, talk of the ghastly shapes which crowd around the gibbet to which the bleaching bones of the murderer hang, talk of the overwhelming terrors of the nightmare, and all these, even when combined together, would fall far short in furnishing an adequate idea of the harrowing nature of those feelings which now took possession of the miserable murderess.

Was it possible that the man had only been in a fit and had come back to life? No, this hypothesis was absurd, for the dose of poison was sufficient to kill a dozen men as powerful and as full of vigorous health as he; and, more-

over, had he not fallen from his chair as if suddenly struck by lightning, and had not she seen his corpselike countenance fixed rigidly in death, ere the lamp had been so mysteriously extinguished?

Then, holy God! was it possible that new life had been infused into the dead man? Had the terrible anticipation of the milliner been signally and awfully fulfilled, and was the corpse endowed with the motion, the power, and the will either to harm or to affright her? Yes, all this was possible, as possible, she felt assured, as that she herself could be thus invisibly enchained and thus stretched motionless and powerless on the carpet by some miraculous and superhuman spell.

But while these thoughts were whirling through her brain, the rustling sound, that awful indication of the movement of the dead, was approaching nearer and nearer. Had it been a serpent winding its way toward her, and forcing upon her active imagination all the horrors of its undulating coils and slimy touch, the effect would not have been half so appalling as was this preternatural, gradient, yet steady and persevering progress of a corpse through the black darkness which filled the chamber.

Fearful as was the consternation which now sat upon the soul of Mrs. Brace, and harrowed as her feelings were, she nevertheless had clearness and vigour of perception sufficient to mark every characteristic, no matter how trivial, of the astounding incident that was now taking place. Thus, her ear becoming accustomed to the rustling sound, she was enabled to form a conjecture of the precise nature of the motion which the body must be undergoing in order to produce that exact noise; and she came to the conclusion that the corpse was being moved, or was moving itself, whichever it might be, flat along the carpet upon its back.

For five minutes did this awful portion of the supernatural drama last, five mortal minutes, each appearing to be a century, and each to contain the essence of whole ages of excruciating torture. At length the wretched woman became aware that the corpse was close beside her; and yet not a hair's breadth could she recoil from the coming contact, not the distance of a pin's point could she move a limb away. The natural impulse of an agonizing horror was to contract her entire form even within herself, as it

were; but this faculty was denied her, so strong, so insuperable was the magic spell thrown upon her by the tetanus.

And now came the awful moment, a moment more fully fraught with undiluted horror than even that when the culprit upon the gallows feels the trap-door slipping away beneath his feet, or when the sailor who has fallen overboard in the southern seas hears the gush of the shark through the water close behind him. Such a moment was it, nay, a more harrowing one still, we affirm, that had now arrived in the existence of Mrs. Brace, — the moment when she felt the first marble-cold touch of the hand of the corpse.

And her own hand was it that thus experienced the initiative contact, her own right hand, which lay by her side as powerless and as completely petrified, so far as motion was concerned, as all the rest of her body. Slowly, slowly did the corpse pass its cold, cold hand over that of the milliner, who shuddered inwardly, but without contracting her form in any way or to the slightest degree. That shudder was a sensation, and not a movement; a feeling, and not a real tremor.

From her own hand the hand of the corpse passed slowly up her arm, which was naked to a little above the elbow; and as the touch of the dead traced its way by very slow degrees over her own plump flesh, she could feel the animal heat in herself gradually retiring beneath the appalling contact which she was thus doomed to experience. Was it not, oh, was it not hell upon earth, and had not her punishment already begun in this world with a foretaste of the horrors of Satan's kingdom?

Though she recoiled, as it were, within herself from this atrocious penance, though she revolted with a rending anguish against so diabolical a torture, yet did she remain in a condition of utter inability to make any real or effectual movement. Not to a hair's breadth could she shift her position; a living statue was she.

And now over the upper portion of her dress passed the heavy cold hand of the corpse, and on to her bosom was continued the loathsome, terrible contact. At the same time that the presence of the dead was thus upon the ample, firm, and exuberant contours which had so often heaved in amorous sport and so frequently pillowed the head of some favoured lover, at the same moment, we say, that the

hand of the corpse thus slowly began to wander over the luxuriant globe that palpitated no longer in wanton enjoyment, but was motionless as the breast of the marble statue, at the same instant was it the horrified woman became aware that the dead body of the murdered man was still drawing itself closer and closer to her side.

And then it really appeared to her as if a scream rose up to the very tip of her tongue, but was stopped by the closed portals formed by her compressed lips; and thus still did her mortal anguish continue to grow the more excruciating from her utter inability to give expression to it.

From her bosom the hand passed slowly, ah! and with a revolting touch, like that of a slimy serpent, along the neck of the tortured woman, as she thus lay motionless on the floor. Over her chin went the hand, then it passed gradually upon her left cheek, and all this while the corpse was drawing close up to her right side. At length the hand quitted her countenance, and the arm wound itself by degrees about her neck, the dead body turning itself toward her the while.

And now the corpse raised itself sufficiently to stoop over and place its cold countenance in contact with the cheek of the milliner; and the arm that circled her neck appeared to press her lovingly. O Heaven! who can describe the hideousness, the revolting loathsomeness, the mortal horror of that unnatural embrace? But, as if the cup of gall and filth and abomination should be filled even to the overflowing, as if there should be nothing required to render this monstrous drama as complete in all its details as possible, and as if this foretaste of posthumous punishment were to be crowned with all the horrors conceivable by mortal imagination, the corpse slowly, but surely and resolutely, glued its lips to the mouth of the milliner and sent with its awful caress an ice-chill throughout her whole frame.

The powers of human endurance were now tested to the extreme, the strength of the human intellect was tried to the last degree. A terrible revulsion ensued all in a moment; the limbs of the woman recovered their power of movement, her jaws were unlocked, and with a cry of mingled horror and anguish she started up.

The light of morning was streaming in between the curtains; and as the milliner cast her eyes wildly around her,

they encountered the face of Peter Grumley's corpse, lying precisely in the same spot and in the same position as when it had fallen from the chair.

Then Mrs. Brace knew that she had been labouring under the influence of a horrible nightmare, a long dream made up of such frightful incidents that the memory thereof must inevitably follow her to the grave, even should her life extend to the uttermost stretch of human existence.

The truth was that when she had sunk down upon the carpet under the influence of the terror caused by the belief that she beheld the countenance of a corpse at the window, the partial fit which had thus seized upon her yielded to the effects of utter exhaustion of mind and body, and a deep slumber fell upon her eyes. No marvel, then, was it if the dread tragedy of the night haunted her in the dreams which accompanied her sleep; and the frightful activity of her disordered fancy displayed its power in the appalling vision which we have detailed so minutely.

But though now released from the terrors of that shocking nightmare, Mrs. Brace still found herself in the presence of the tremendous embarrassment which her crime had created. She looked at her watch; it was half-past six o'clock in the morning. The night was gone, and nothing was done to dispose of the corpse. Such was her reflection; and then came the maddening conviction that she could not possibly make away with it unless by the assistance of one or more of her domestics. But to place herself in their power — ah! better have remained at the mercy of Peter Grumley and have been spared the remorse and the dangers attendant upon the crime of murder.

But what was she to do? How was she to act? It was useless to repine any more; the past could not be recalled, and it became imperiously necessary to adopt measures for the security of the future. Upon the body she stood gazing for some minutes while these thoughts passed through her mind; and she no longer experienced any feelings of terror, for it is not by daylight that murderers are afraid.

But what was she to do? A hundred times in a minute did she ask herself this question, and no satisfactory answer could she give. At length she reasoned with herself that nothing could now be done for some hours, that she must conceal the corpse as well as she could until the next night

and in the meantime there would be ample leisure to resolve upon the most prudent course to be then adopted.

Having thus succeeded in looking at her position with more calmness and deliberation than she had hitherto been enabled to call to her assistance from the moment the Bow Street officer fell a corpse at her feet, the milliner resolved to conceal the body in her bathroom adjoining. She, however, found it no easy task to drag so huge a mass into that place; but at length she accomplished this task, and, locking the door, she felt that she could begin to breathe more freely.

She now hastened to lay aside her garments, which she had worn all night; but when she approached the mirror, she recoiled in horror and dismay at the ghastly countenance that was reflected therein. And yet those features were her own, and it was no spectral face which looked at her through the medium of that glass.

But, great Heaven! what an effect had this one night of suffering, terror, guilt, and anguish produced upon the milliner! Her eyes were sunken and hollow, her lips were livid, her face was cadaverous where the rouge lay not upon it, and upon the cheeks that paint added to the ghastliness of her looks.

"This will not do," murmured Mrs. Brace to herself. "My appearance will excite the strangest suspicions. Nothing but my accustomed bath will effectually revive me."

And to take this bath it was necessary to return into the place whither she had dragged the corpse; but as the beams of morning grew brighter within the rooms, all superstitious terrors evaporated from the milliner's breast. She accordingly laid aside her apparel, entered the bathroom, threw a cloth over the countenance of the dead body, and indulged in her wonted immersion in cold water.

On issuing from the bathroom, she once more locked the door carefully; and, contemplating herself in the glass, murmured in a tone of mingled triumph and satisfaction, "The night I have passed was terrible, terrible; but it has not left a trace which the world's eye shall observe."

The milliner then proceeded with her toilet; and in half an hour she descended to the apartment where her young ladies were assembled for breakfast.

And no one could possibly have imagined nor would even have believed, if informed of the fact, that within the

previous eight hours Mrs. Brace had not only committed a murder but had passed every moment of that period alone with the corpse of her victim.

And who that passed by the house that morning and saw all the usual preparations being made for the commercial business of the day, the shop windows decked out with bonnets of the newest shape, caps of the most coquettish fashion, and lace collars of the most costly species, and then, glancing into the shop itself, that bevy of charming young women all wearing so modest a demeanour and all attired with such exquisite neatness, who, we ask, that thus beheld the establishment of Mrs. Brace that morn, could have possibly suspected that there was the corpse of a murdered man in the house?

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BARONET AND THE ROYAL MAIDEN

WE must take a temporary leave of Mrs. Brace, inasmuch as before we can continue the thread of her adventures there is an episode of interest and importance which must be duly woven into our narrative.

The scene shifts to the environs of Windsor, where Sir Richard Stamford was occupying furnished apartments in a comfortable but secluded dwelling kept by a worthy old couple who never troubled themselves about other people's business. There were no other lodgers in the house; and thus the baronet not only enjoyed the retirement which was so necessary to tranquillize a mind that had passed through so much torturing excitement, but he was likewise free from any of that episonage or impertinent observation which any peculiarity of habits usually entails upon the individual who establishes his quarters in a provincial town.

It was about noon on the day following that fearful night the incidents of which have occupied the preceding chapter; and Sir Richard Stamford was seated in the parlour at his lodging, busily engaged in the perusal of some letters which he had just received from his solicitor at Aylesbury. The contents appeared to give him satisfaction; and it was even with an expression of mingled joy and triumph upon his countenance that he glanced from time to time at the totals presented by two long columns of figures on a balance-sheet that lay spread out before him.

In the midst of this occupation he was interrupted by a gentle knock at the door of his apartment; and having desired the individual to enter, he sprang from his seat with an ejaculation of mingled delight and astonishment on beholding the Princess Amelia.

Her Royal Highness was attired with an elegant simplicity which became her style of beauty far more advantageously than the richest apparel gemmed with precious stones. The modest gipsy-hat enhanced the air of winning softness and sweet amiability which characterized her countenance; and the rich contours of her full, voluptuous form were developed rather than concealed by the plain dress which fitted closely to her fine, luxuriant shape.

The smile that wreathed her lips parted them so as to display the teeth of dazzling whiteness; and her cheeks wore the healthy glow of virginal freshness that had deepened with the rapid walk which the royal lady had taken through the park.

"Beautiful princess!" exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, throwing himself upon his knees before her and pressing to his lips the hand which she extended toward him, "how can I sufficiently testify my gratitude for this honour, this unexpected pleasure?"

"If you mean to regard my visit as an honour, Sir Richard," said the princess, "you will at once invest it with a cold formality which will destroy all the meaning and significance which I had wished to impart to it. In a word, it was as a friend that I came to see you."

"And as my good genius, my guardian angel, do I welcome you," cried the baronet, again pressing Amelia's hand to his lips. Then, rising from his knees and gently conducting her to a seat, he placed himself by her side, saying, "This is the happiest moment I have known for a long, long time, and far happier than I had ever hoped to experience again."

"Now you speak in a manner which gives me pleasure," said the princess; but, feeling that a blush was rapidly overspreading her countenance, she hastened to observe, "We have pledged a lasting and indestructible friendship to each other, and it was this sentiment which prompted me to take a step that under other circumstances would be improper and inconsistent to a degree. Tell me, therefore, that you do not think less of me for having intruded myself upon your privacy; tell me that I have not suffered in your estimation."

"Oh, my dearest friend, for such you have permitted me to call you, and such you have indeed proved yourself,"

exclaimed the baronet, surveying the princess with a species of holy adoration in which there was nought gross nor sensual, "how is it possible that you can ask me if I be offended by this crowning proof of your kindness toward me? When we have walked together for hours in the park and the wind has been too cold for you to sit down to rest yourself, I should have besought you to bless my humble dwelling with your presence if only for a few minutes; but I was fearful of giving offence. And yet I have felt at the time how happy I should be if you were to cross the threshold of this apartment where I pass so many hours alone — thinking of you," he added, in a tone of deep and fervid emotion.

"Then I am glad that I have on this occasion obeyed the sudden fancy that took possession of me as I was traversing the park," said the Princess Amelia, her own voice sounding tremulously, as if it were laden with ineffable feeling. "For I came forth to walk at an earlier hour than usual this morning," she continued, "and knowing that you would not think of coming to meet me until half-past twelve, I resolved to surprise you by this visit, which perhaps speaks more eloquently on behalf of my friendship than of my discretion," she observed, in a tone of embarrassment and with a blush again deepening the vermeil glow upon her damask cheeks.

"My angelic friend," exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, now taking her hand of his own accord, "do not mar by any regret or compunction on your part the pleasure which this visit causes me to experience. Hitherto, amiable princess, you have performed toward me the part of the good Samaritan. You have poured the oil and wine of sympathy and consolation into the wounds of my spirit; you have rescued me from the doom of misanthropy and the fate of cynicism; and, guiding me gently out of the bleak and desolate wilderness of my own dark thoughts, you have tutored me to contemplate the roses of hope which yet bloom in this world even for one who has endured so much as I. Had it not been for you, excellent princess, I should have resigned myself to despair — or perhaps have flown to that more terrible alternative to which the desperate have recourse, but of which I now shudder even to think. Oh, how deep, then, is the debt of gratitude which I owe to you, generous-hearted lady; and how immensely have you augmented that obliga-

tion by the frank, ingenuous, and friendly manner in which you have now visited me. Henceforth this room will appear to me under another and far more cheerful aspect; and when seated alone herein, contemplating your image, I shall retain the delightful remembrance that you yourself have lightened the darkness of my abode."

"You are addressing me with an enthusiasm which carries an ineffable pleasure into my soul," said the Princess Amelia; "for I perceive that I have been the means of restoring you at least to some degree of happiness."

"Dear lady, when I am in your presence," returned the baronet, gazing with admiration upon her, "the past, frightful as it is, appears only as a dream, or as something which is so far off as scarcely to leave a black shade in the memory."

"And when I am not with you, the gloomy cloud comes back to sit upon your soul and brood the darkest thoughts?" said the princess, her voice assuming a tenderness which stole like Elysian music upon the senses of the baronet and carried a soft ecstasy of feeling in unto the very depths of his soul.

"Alas! when I am alone," he observed, after a pause of nearly a minute and now heaving a profound sigh, "I have only your image to solace me. But then I ponder upon every word that has fallen from your lips during the hours we have been together, and I repeat a thousand times to myself the solacing assurance which you always give me at parting, that we shall meet again on the morrow. And we do meet thus, day after day, and my existence appears to have undergone so complete a change and have entered upon a phase so thoroughly new that there are moments when I cease even to regret the prosperity of earlier years."

"And in order to keep you in this happy frame of mind," said the royal maiden, lowering her voice to a whisper that was only just audible, as she bent down her head to conceal her blushes, "and likewise to prevent the return of the gloomy mood, I should never leave you."

"Great Heaven! what words are these which you have uttered?" ejaculated the baronet, starting in mingled amazement and alarm at the sudden intuition which sprang up in his mind, or rather at the light which was thrown, all in a moment, upon the state of his own feelings.

"Wherefore this excitement?" asked the princess, gazing upon him anxiously.

"Because you have just made an observation, dear lady," responded the baronet, "which has opened my mental eyes to a truth unsuspected until now, and the sudden revelation of which to my senses produced mingled feelings of surprise and terror."

"And that truth — what is it?" demanded the Princess Amelia, trembling all over and still contemplating the baronet with those lovely azure eyes which appeared to swim in a delicious languor.

"I dare not answer your question," replied Sir Richard, now evincing much embarrassment and confusion.

"If there be secrets between us, Richard," murmured the royal maiden, "what becomes of the friendship which we have pledged each other?"

"Oh, what am I to say? What am I to do?" exclaimed the baronet, his whole frame quivering with emotions of an indescribable ecstasy as he pressed the hand of the princess in his own and gazed intently on her beauteous, blushing countenance; for this was the first time she had ever ventured to call him by his Christian name alone, and the circumstance amounted almost to an avowal on her part, or at least to an encouragement of such an avowal from his lips.

"What are you to say?" repeated the princess, who herself felt as if she were bathing in a fount of bliss and as if the gates of paradise were slowly unfolding to her contemplation all the joys within. "What are you to say, do you ask?" she murmured again. "Oh, answer me frankly and candidly, and tell me the nature of that truth which has so suddenly become apparent to your comprehension?"

"But I may offend you, dear princess; I may risk your friendship, — that friendship which I value more than life," exclaimed the baronet, bewildered how to act.

"No feeling which you are capable of harbouring can possibly offend me, Richard," said Amelia, her tone expressing the soft sensuousness which was diffused throughout her entire frame and was expressed in the deepening hue of the swimming eyes and the glowing tint which spread its carnation richness over her cheeks.

"Then you command me to speak candidly, dear princess?" said the baronet.

"No, I do not command," she responded, with an accent of gentle reproach. "I beseech, I implore."

"Then hear the truth, adorable Amelia," exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, throwing himself again upon his knees at her feet; and gazing up into her blushing, burning face with looks full of ineffable devotion, he said, in a voice of fervent passion, "I love you, Amelia. My God! I love you with all the power of a grateful soul and an adoring heart."

"You love me, you love me?" murmured the princess, now enjoying the happiest moment of her life; and, casting her arms around the neck of the handsome man who knelt at her feet, she gave back with ardour the warm kisses which he imprinted upon her lips, her cheeks, and her brow.

"Love you! Yes, oh, yes! Such sympathy as I have received from you, sweet lady, could not fail to engender love," responded Sir Richard Stamford.

"Thank God! he loves me, he loves me!" still murmured the Princess Amelia, appearing to pour her whole soul, her life, her being, into the ecstasy produced by the avowal of affection which she had received from the lips of the baronet.

"And is it possible that you can love me in return?" he asked, rising slowly from his knees and resuming his place by her side, although without disengaging himself from the warm embrace in which she held him.

"It is possible, it is true, it is God's own truth that I love you, that I would lay down my life to serve you," exclaimed the royal maiden, with impassioned vehemence; and she continued to lavish her caresses with the fondest ardour upon the baronet.

"Your friendship, Amelia, was a boon which could not be too dearly prized," he said, returning the kisses which she thus bestowed upon him; "but your love, oh, that is a happiness so totally unexpected, so unlooked for."

"Ah! is it possible that you could have mistaken the feeling with which I regarded you, Richard?" inquired the princess, in a tone of tender reproach. "Did you not perceive that I loved you?"

"I dared not trust my thoughts upon the subject," replied the baronet. "But the nature of my own feelings was not understood by me until those words which you uttered just now struck, as it were, upon the concealed chord of tenderness and vibrated to my very heart's core. Thence the

inspiration was carried to the brain, and I perceived in a moment that I loved you."

"Oh, what happiness is it to love and be beloved!" murmured the princess, suffering her bonnet to fall off and reclining her head upon the baronet's shoulder. Then, closing her eyes for nearly a minute as if to shut out all external objects and thus render the revel of her own thoughts all the more luxuriously complete, she said, "And have I indeed taught your heart to love once more, Richard, and do you really comprehend the nature of your own sentiments? Because it would break my heart were you to tell me, tomorrow, or in a week, or in a month, or even in a year, that you were mistaken, that you were carried away by the enthusiasm of a moment—"

"Oh, do not mistrust the nature of that passion which I experience for you," interrupted the baronet, looking down into the depths of those beauteous azure eyes which the royal maiden now opened again, and which gave back a living flood of fondness in return for his own adoring gaze. "Do not suspect the truth nor doubt the sincerity of that sentiment which has become a worship, a faith, a creed, an enthusiastic devotion in my soul. Nor marvel, beauteous Amelia, that a being lately so lorn, desolate, and woebegone as I can have thus learned to love so soon and so tenderly again. For all that has happened is natural and easily to be explained; and I were indeed something less or something more than man had I not yielded to the Elysian influence wherewith I was surrounded. Not a month has elapsed since you found me the most miserable wretch upon the face of the earth. Every hope which could possibly bind me to existence was dead, crucified by the faithlessness of a woman and the treachery of friends. And thus had my bosom become the burial-place of life's brightest promises, the grave of every aspiration which this world's sun had gilded. My heart was a tomb wherein reposed the memories of blighted affections, ruined hopes, and false friendships; and at the entrance of that sepulchral heart had the demon of despair placed a stone to bar admission against all tender sympathies. But you came, Amelia; you rolled away that stone, and you sat in my heart as an angel, proclaiming the resurrection of hope."

"Oh, it is delightful to hear you thus account for that

love which fills your soul, and which I no longer mistrust nor doubt," cried the princess, flinging herself upon the baronet's breast and appearing to grow there. "And I thank God," she continued, in a tone of exalted fervour, "that I have been the instrument of thus reawakening you to a sense of earth's bliss and the world's enjoyment."

"This world has suddenly become a paradise to my view," responded Sir Richard Stamford. "And yet, even now in the midst of this felicity which is so transcendent as to appear a dream, even now, I say, does a sudden cause of alarm spring up —"

"Alarm!" echoed the princess, withdrawing herself partially from his embrace and surveying him with mingled apprehension and surprise.

"Oh, the alarm to which I allude springs from the love which I bear you," hastily exclaimed the baronet; "and it is indeed a natural consequence of that passion."

"I do not understand you yet, Richard," said the royal maiden. "In mercy, explain yourself, and keep me not in suspense."

"I mean, dearest Amelia," resumed the baronet, contemplating her with ineffable fondness, "that the love which I experience is not centred in a common object, but in a lady of the most exalted rank, a lady to whose hand I dare not aspire and with whom no clandestine marriage would be legal —"

"The love which I bear for you has no consideration of rites, ceremonies, or forms," interrupted the princess Amelia, with a decision which belonged to her character, but which the strength of her passion now mainly inspired. "It is a love," she continued, looking steadily upon his countenance, "which can recognize no human laws, no conventional statutes, a love acknowledging only the heart's tenderest and holiest ties, the soul's most sacred and solemn bonds. If this be the love that you can accept and that will make you happy, if this be the passion that you can reciprocate as tenderly and as devotedly —"

"Oh, can you doubt it, my best beloved, my charming Amelia?" exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, catching her in his arms and straining her to his breast. "This is indeed a day of happiness for me. I awoke with a presentiment that many occurrences of a smiling character were to take place

ere night should come again. And I have not been disappointed. Behold those letters," he continued, pointing toward the papers lying upon the table. "They are from my solicitor at Aylesbury, and they arrived this morning. Their contents are far more cheering than even my most sanguine hopes could have led me to believe. All my property has been sold and realized. The Earl of Desborough has become the purchaser of the manor, at a large price, and not only has every creditor of the late bank been paid in full, but a handsome income remains for me. That balance-sheet, dearest Amelia, enables me to hold up my head again and look the world in the face."

"Oh, sincerely, most sincerely do I congratulate you, my beloved Richard," exclaimed the princess. "Heaven knows you have suffered enough, and it is time that the wheel of fortune should turn."

"It has turned, and a new phase is presented to my view," observed the baronet. "Oh, how can I be otherwise than thoroughly happy, at least as happy as a man may be who has endured so much as I? My character is fully cleared up, my liabilities are settled, the world once more calls me an honourable man, and then comes your love, my angel Amelia, to bless me with its heavenly influence. And that love, oh, I accept it as you have offered; I accept it as the pure incense of your affectionate heart, and I will remain worthy of it until death shall separate us."

"And on my side," said the princess, "I vow most solemnly, and I call Heaven to attest the oath, that I will remain single for your sake —"

"Oh, pledge not yourself thus rashly!" interrupted the baronet with vehemence.

"Nay, hinder me not," said the royal maiden, with a tone and manner of indomitable decision, while her beauteous countenance became lighted up by a kindred glow of enthusiasm. "Hinder me not, I say, nor fear that I shall ever repent of the words I am about to utter. But hear me patiently and attentively while I invoke Heaven to attest my vow that I will remain unmarried, Richard, for thy sake; that I will reject every negotiation which may be made by others for the disposal of my hand, and that I will live and die thy wife in the sight of Heaven, if not in the eyes of the world."

"The tongue of man has no language to express an adequate amount of gratitude for so much disinterested love," said Sir Richard Stamford, sinking upon one knee and pressing the fair hand of the princess between both his own. "Your vow is recorded, solemnly recorded, Amelia, and I do not ask you to withdraw it. Your love is therefore pledged to me, and in return I pledge thee mine. Yes, dearest and most beauteous of women, accept the tenderest affection united with the most fervent gratitude of my heart; and believe that I will perish sooner than cause thee pain either by word or deed."

"And these vows which we have exchanged are irrevocable," said the Princess Amelia, in a solemn tone, as she forced her lover to rise from his kneeling posture. Then, throwing herself into his arms, she said, "Richard, I am thy wife, thy wife in the sight of Heaven, and thou art my husband."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE EXCITEMENT AND TERRORS OF GUILT

WE must now return to Mrs. Brace, and take up the thread of her adventures which we were compelled to relinquish for a moment.

Although she continued to wear a smiling face in the presence of her young ladies, and although, when customers came, she assumed an exterior which was admirably calculated to produce the impression that no woman in the universe enjoyed a mental tranquillity more complete than her own, yet throughout the livelong day did she in reality endure the tortures of the damned.

Again must we observe that this poignancy of feeling arose not so much from remorse as from alarm, vexation, and despair at the perilous position in which she had placed herself. For every minute recurred the question, what was she to do with the body, and the oftener she put this interrogatory to herself, the more bewildered did she become.

Then, the necessity of maintaining a pleasant exterior was a task very far from being unaccompanied with difficulty; and she felt that it was hard indeed, nay, fraught with a mental agony the most acute, to wreathe her lips into smiles while a vulture was gnawing at her heart.

In the course of the forenoon, Harriet applied to her for the key of the bathchamber, that the housemaid might perform her usual duties there; and Mrs. Brace was compelled to invent some excuse the triviality of which made her blush up to the very hair of her head as she uttered it, and then the colour disappeared as rapidly with the mortal terror that struck to her heart. But Harriet noticed not that the apology was ridiculous or that there was anything peculiar in the manner of her mistress. It was conscience which thus

rendered the wretched woman a coward, and made her not only suspect her own actions, but likewise the construction which might be put upon them.

In the afternoon an ill-looking fellow called at the fashionable establishment in Pall Mall and insisted upon seeing Mrs. Brace alone. He would not state his business, nor yet send in his name; and when this doggedness of conduct on his part was communicated by a domestic to the milliner, she was struck by a mortal chill, as if death had suddenly seized upon her. For the first tremendous thought which the message excited in her mind was that her crime had been somehow or another suspected and that an officer of justice was coming to search the house. But at the next moment she discarded the idea as one which her terrors could alone have generated; and, regaining her presence of mind by an almost preterhuman effort, she commanded the domestic to admit the persevering visitor into her presence.

The moment the fellow was shown to the parlour, where she waited to receive him, she recognized a man whom she had seen in Grumley's company at Bow Street; and once more was she nearly annihilated by the tremendous terror which fell upon her like a dead weight. Sinking back into the chair whence she had risen, she demanded the man's business in a voice which despair alone endowed with any degree of firmness.

Her emotion was not likely to escape the keen glance of so watchful an individual as Mobbs, for he the visitor was; but as there happened to be wine-decanter upon the table, it instantaneously struck the officer that Mrs. Brace had been indulging somewhat too freely — in plain terms, that she was drunk. He accordingly said within himself, "Grumley was right; she is a very fine woman, but it's a pity she drinks so precious hard."

Then, having hastily made this observation to himself, Mr. Mobbs proceeded to observe that he was a Bow Street officer, and that this was the reason he did not choose to send in his name or profession, as he thought that Mrs. Brace would prefer granting him a personal interview rather than exchange messages through the medium of the servant.

The extreme civility which Mobbs contrived to throw into his manner, and the language in which he embodied the above very natural explanation, not only reassured Mrs. Brace, but

likewise allowed her the leisure necessary to recover her self-possession; and, shocked at the idea that she had exhibited emotions which must be either incomprehensible to the man or upon which he must have put the strangest construction, she hastened to observe that she was suffering under a very severe indisposition, of which a bewildering headache constituted a part. She then once more demanded the business which had brought Mobbs thither; and the man proceeded to explain himself in the following manner:

"The fact is, ma'am, last night me and my master, Mr. Peter Grumley, the head officer of Bow Street, separated at your door, me going one way, and Mr. Grumley remaining behind to pay his respects to you. But he hasn't made his appearance this morning at the office or yet been heard of at his lodgings; and therefore I thought as how you might have sent him off somewhere on partickler business."

"It is perfectly true that your comrade called upon me last night," said Mrs. Brace, who had now altogether recovered her presence of mind; "but he did not remain with me above ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, and then he took his departure."

"Well, this is wery strange," said Mobbs, evidently much perplexed. Then, after a few moments' deep thought, he observed, inquiringly, "P'raps it wouldn't be too bold, ma'am, if I was to ask whether you paid him any money?"

"Yes, five hundred guineas, according to agreement," was the prompt answer. "I know that I may trust you as confidently as if it were Mr. Grumley himself," she added, with a smile.

"To be sure you may, ma'am," observed Mobbs. Then, recurring to the topic which was uppermost in his mind, he said, in a musing tone, "I should scarcely think that Grumley has gone and got into dangerous company with all that swag about his person. He's rayther too knowing for that sort of thing; and as for his being attacked, robbed, and murdered in the open streets, that isn't likely."

"Depend upon it, your friend will make his appearance in the course of the day," said Mrs. Brace. "Perhaps he has taken a little drop too much in the company of some jovial revellers and is sleeping away his headache."

"No, ma'am, that isn't like Peter Grumley," said Mobbs, shaking his head ominously. "If he isn't murdered, then

he's bolted, that's all," ejaculated the man, a sudden idea striking him. "And now that I think well upon the subject, I dessay he has cut and run, not on'y through fear of the consekvences of letting that young gal escape last night, but also to cheat me out of my reglars in respect to the five hundred guineas which he received from you."

"I should not at all wonder if you have hit upon the real truth at last," observed Mrs. Brace, scarcely able to restrain her joy at the false scent upon which the official understrapper had got. "Indeed, Mr. Grumley hinted to me last night that he was afraid it would prove the dearest five hundred guineas he ever fingered in all his life."

"Ah! if he said that, ma'am," exclaimed Mobbs, "there isn't no longer any doubt upon the subjeck. He's bolted, clear enough, and I'm left behind to bear the brunt."

"Well, as you were his associate in a matter which more or less interested myself," said Mrs. Brace, "I cannot suffer you to go altogether unrewarded; and I therefore beg your acceptance of these fifty guineas."

The eyes of Mobbs sparkled with delight as the milliner counted down the gold upon the table; and as he took up the shining pieces and weighed them in his rough, horny hand, he expressed his thanks over and over again.

"Of course," said Mrs. Brace, as he was about to quit the room, "my name will not be mentioned, under any circumstances, no matter what may transpire."

"Trust me for that, ma'am," rejoined Mobbs; and he then took his departure.

Mrs. Brace now breathed far more freely than she had done for many hours; and thus the visit of Mobbs, which had at first assumed so ominous an aspect and struck such terror into her soul, proved the source of an incalculable relief to her apprehensions. She saw that Grumley's disappearance would everywhere receive the natural interpretation of a flight to avoid the consequences of letting a prisoner escape; and this conviction inspired her with a sense of security which nerved her to look calmly and deliberately at the embarrassment wherein she was placed with regard to the dead body.

The deeper she pondered upon the matter, the more imperiously necessary did it seem to admit some one to her confidence; and she finally resolved, as the night approached,

to entrust the tremendous secret to Harriet, her faithful abigail. But she postponed the evil moment as long as possible; and it was not until the young ladies had retired to rest and the clock was striking eleven that the milliner, who was now seated alone in her parlour, could muster up courage sufficient to enter upon the appalling topic.

At length, feeling that an excitement was growing upon her which would speedily destroy all her resolution and throw her ideas into chaotic disorder, she rang the bell; and when Harriet made her appearance, she bade the young woman follow her up-stairs to her own chamber.

Upon gaining this room, the milliner placed the candle upon the toilet-table and locked the door. Then, suddenly fixing her eyes, which had in a moment become wild and haggard, upon the lady's-maid, she said, in a deep voice, "Harriet, I am about to reveal to you a terrible secret."

"Ah! madam, is it possible that you are on the point of giving birth to a child?" said the dependent, her knowledge of her mistress's frailty instantly exciting this idea in her mind.

"Would to God that it were no worse, Harriet!" returned Mrs. Brace, speaking in a hollow whisper. "But I implore you to steady your mind, in order to receive as calmly as possible a revelation that is only too well calculated to fill you with horror."

"Merciful Heaven! ma'am, what do you mean?" exclaimed Harriet, now catching the infection of the milliner's harrowed feelings.

"I mean," responded her mistress, in a still lower, deeper, and more hollow tone, while her looks expressed all the mingled anguish and terror that had become resuscitated in her soul, "I mean, Harriet, that there is a dead body in yon bathroom."

"Oh, horror!" ejaculated the young woman, with a stifling shriek, and, staggering backward, she threw her eyes in unspeakable terror toward the door of the adjacent chamber.

"Silence, and courage, I conjure you," said Mrs. Brace, clasping her hands in agonizing entreaty. "If you alarm the house you will ruin me; but if you will assist me, I will load you with favours and benefits."

"Speak, madam, what can I do?" demanded the lady's-

maid, struggling as well as she was able against the horrified feelings that had seized upon her.

"Listen to me for a few moments, my dear Harriet," said the milliner, speaking with all the rapidity of a hysterical excitement. "You remember that the Bow Street officer called last evening? Well, he became intoxicated, he pressed me with his licentious proposals. I was compelled to submit — my God! what could I do? I conducted him hither, and all in a moment he fell down dead at my feet, stricken by the lightning-stroke of apoplexy."

"Dead, at your feet!" echoed Harriet, shuddering convulsively and repeating the milliner's words with the mechanical impulse of dire horror.

"Yes, in an instant was I plunged into this cruel embarrassment," said Mrs. Brace; "and all last night I remained here, alone with the corpse. Now you are acquainted with this terrible secret, Harriet."

"Oh, I wish that I had never known it, ma'am," exclaimed the young woman, covering her face with her hands as if to shut out some hideous object from her view.

"Ah! now you drive me to despair, Harriet," moaned the wretched milliner. "My God! what is to be done?"

"I know not," responded the abigail, dropping her hands suddenly, but only to wring them frantically. "It already seems to me as if a murder had been committed and that I was an accessory."

"A murder!" repeated Mrs. Brace, in a hollow tone and with a convulsive start. Then, fixing her haggard eyes upon her dependent, she said, "You do not suppose, Harriet — you cannot think that I — I — caused the death of that man?"

"I am afraid to think, ma'am; I recoil from my own thoughts," returned Harriet, her tone and manner both acquiring firmness from actual despair. Then, as if suddenly conquering repugnances until this moment invincible, and summoning all her resolution to her aid, the young woman exclaimed, "But there is no time to lose, and we must meet this embarrassment face to face."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Harriet, dear Harriet, for this change in your conduct toward me," said the unhappy Mrs. Brace. "Tell me what we ought to do. I will place

myself entirely in your hands, and your reward shall exceed all your expectations."

"It is impossible that you and I can dispose of the body alone," resumed Harriet, her courage and presence of mind appearing to gain strength in proportion as the feelings of her mistress underwent a painful reaction. "We must make a confidant of one of the men-servants," she added, emphatically.

"Oh, Harriet!" murmured Mrs. Brace, shocked at the thought of falling so completely into the power of her domestics; but the next moment an idea struck her, and she exclaimed, "If I mistake not, there is a tolerable good understanding between you and Frederick?"

"We keep company together, ma'am," observed Harriet; for the individual to whom Mrs. Brace had alluded was one of the footmen belonging to that part of her establishment which looked upon St. James's Square.

"Listen, then, my dear girl," continued the milliner, who now rapidly recovered her own self-possession, inasmuch as she saw a means whereby the coöperation and silence of her lady's-maid and her footman could be alike secured. "About the person of the dead man there is no less than a sum of five hundred and fifty guineas, all of which he received from me."

For the reader will remember that in addition to the amount paid by the milliner for the services rendered by Grumley in the affair of Caroline Waters, fifty guineas had likewise been demanded by the constable as one of the conditions on which he liberated the Gallows' Widow from his custody.

"And that sum of which you speak, ma'am?" said Harriet, in a tone of inquiring eagerness, as her eyes sparkled with cupidity.

"Every farthing shall be yours as a wedding dowry," replied Mrs. Brace; "and I will give Frederick a hundred guineas into the bargain. Do you not think he will be happy to marry you upon these terms?"

"Leave it to me to manage," exclaimed the lady's-maid, her handsome countenance lighting up with exultation. "This very night shall the dead body be disposed of in such a way — But time wears on," she cried, hastily interrupting herself, and glancing with a certain degree of

reviving uneasiness at the bathroom door. "I will go at once and fetch Frederick to help us."

"But you will hurry back as soon as you can? You will not keep me waiting here — alone?" said the milliner, shuddering at the reminiscences which swept through her mind and which made her soul recoil in horror from the mere thought of the diabolical dream that had characterized the preceding night.

"In five minutes I will return with Frederick, ma'am," said the lady's-maid; and she hastened from the room.

But the instant Mrs. Brace thus found herself once more alone in the close vicinage of the corpse of her victim, a dreadful oppression came over her, the atmosphere of the chamber seemed hot, as if laden with the steam of human blood, a strange humming sound stole upon her ears, as if the low voices of invisible spectres were repeating the tale of midnight murder, and ghastly countenances suddenly appeared to be looking forth upon her from the obscurity which enveloped the extremities of the apartment and from every nook where the furniture threw a sombre shadow.

For upwards of a minute did she remain standing in the middle of the room, struggling against the awful feeling of uneasiness which was thus gaining upon her; but so intolerable did it become that she opened the door leading into the passage and listened in anxious expectation of hearing the returning footsteps of Harriet accompanied by her lover. But all was still, all was silent as the grave; and then Mrs. Brace feared that some one was standing behind her. Re-entering the room, she approached the cupboard and poured herself out a glass of brandy; but the creaking of the closet door on its hinges caused her to give so sudden a start that she spilt a portion of the liquor while conveying it to her lips. Nevertheless, she imbibed sufficient to animate her with that bastard courage which constitutes an armour wherewith to gird the guilty soul; and she repeated the dram in order to enhance that unnatural flow of spirits which was so suddenly excited within her. Yes, the burning alcohol had become her brazen corselet, her helm, and her shield, to defend her against the spectres of terror and the demons of remorse. The fiery spirit which she had so copiously poured down her throat became her armour of proof, and she staggered beneath the weight of her panoply.

Then, experiencing a sensation of stifling heat, the milliner proceeded to take off her gown and unlace her stays; and assuming a loose wrapper, she even smiled at herself complacently in the mirror as she negligently fastened the flowing garment around her luxuriant and voluptuous shape.

But this sentiment of self-complacency, which was only the feverish fume of the alcohol, speedily yielded to a feeling of anxiety, and she wondered what could possibly detain Harriet so long.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DISPOSAL OF THE CORPSE

IN the meantime Harriet had proceeded with light, quick, and noiseless step to the chamber of Frederick Dray, the junior of the two footmen in the employ of Mrs. Brace.

He was a young and handsome man, tall and well formed, possessing good hair, eyes, and teeth, and entertaining by no means a bad opinion of his own qualifications, both personal and intellectual. Selfish and profligate, extravagant and unprincipled, treacherous and hypocritical, Frederick Dray was in reality a most dangerous character, although the worst features of his disposition had as yet received no opportunity of manifesting themselves in the household of Mrs. Brace. Thus, although Harriet was upon the utmost terms of intimacy with this individual, she was far from suspecting how thoroughly heartless he was, and how capable of any turpitude in order to enhance his own interests or further his own views.

On the particular night in question, he had not long ascended to his own chamber when a slight tap at the door announced the presence of the lady's-maid, who has already been described in the early part of our narrative as a fine, handsome young woman, about twenty years of age.

Frederick, who had not begun to undress, was by no means astonished at this visit; and therefore the reader may rest assured that it was not the first time he had thus been favoured with the presence of Harriet in his bedroom at an hour when modesty would have blushed at the proceeding.

"Well, my dear girl," he said, in a tone half-kind and half-superciliously conceited, "you cannot do without me, eh?"

Must come to your Frederick's arms? Couldn't live a week away from him?"

"You know that I love you, Fred," she observed, going up to him as he sat upon his bed, and throwing her arm around his neck.

"Well, I am not astonished that you should like me a little," he exclaimed; "for I am not the ugliest fellow in the world, nor yet the greatest fool. But what is the matter with you, Harriet?" he demanded, observing that there was something singular, or at all events, unusual, in the young woman's looks and manner.

"Frederick," she said, not exactly replying to his question, "you are aware that I shall not be able to conceal my position much longer. Will you not fulfil your promise — and — and marry me, without further delay?"

"It is all very easy, my girl, to talk of marriage," responded the conceited footman; "but where the devil is the money to come from? 'Tis true that I get good wages and pick up many perquisites and presents in this house; but I don't know how the deuce it is, the money does run away so fast —"

"Because you are so very, very extravagant, Fred," interrupted Harriet. "However, I do not mean to reproach you," she added, assuming her most coaxing and endearing manner; "for I am very fond of you, and I know that if you had the means, you would fulfil your promise and marry me."

"Well, I don't know but what I might," said the young man. "That is to say," he added, with a look of extreme animal grossness, "if I was sure that the child which you are soon to bring forth is really my own."

"I take God to witness my oath that it is," ejaculated Harriet, her countenance flushing with excitement.

"Come, you needn't put yourself into a rage, my dear," said her paramour, with the most haughty indifference; "for you are very well aware that I was not the first, nor the second —"

"But you know that I have remained faithful to you, Fred, from the moment that you began to pay your addresses to me," interrupted Harriet, the tears starting into her eyes; "and it is not generous to reproach me for the past, particularly as I never attempted to deceive you on

that score. I admitted that Lord Montgomery had seduced me, in the first instance, and that Lord Florimel had afterward been intimate with me; but none other save yourself — ”

“ Well, well, we won’t quarrel about it, Harriet,” exclaimed the footman. “ Come, begin to undress — ”

“ Oh, but you have not yet answered my question,” interrupted the young woman, impatiently. “ I wish to know whether you would marry me, if we had enough money to set us up in housekeeping? ”

“ You really begin to make me suspect that you have either picked up a purse or found a treasure in some nook,” said the man-servant; “ or else one of your former lovers has promised to give you a dowry. Come, which is it? ”

“ And suppose it really was something of the sort? ” exclaimed Harriet, with an arch smile which displayed her fine teeth and made her large blue eyes look roguish as well as naturally wanton.

“ The truth is, my dear girl,” responded the self-sufficient footman, caressing his whiskers, “ and I may as well relieve you of all suspense at once, — I have vowed within myself that I will never bestow my hand upon any young woman who cannot show me a dowry of five hundred guineas. So now there can be no misunderstanding between us.”

“ Not at all,” ejaculated the lady’s-maid, overjoyed at the manner in which the conversation was now progressing. “ To come to the point at once, then, I can put you in the way of obtaining five hundred and fifty guineas this very night, and if you keep your promise and marry me, Mrs. Brace will give you a hundred more.”

“ Mrs. Brace! What has she got to do with the matter? ” demanded Frederick Dray, turning an incredulous look upon his handsome mistress.

“ Oh, I will explain everything in a moment,” she replied; “ but give me the promise.”

“ Well, I swear to marry you upon those conditions,” exclaimed the footman. “ Indeed, I shall be most happy to do so, and sha’n’t consider that I’m flinging myself away. But what is required of me in order to earn the five hundred and fifty guineas? — and what the devil has our mis’sus to do with the affair? ”

“ Listen, and don’t start with astonishment, because you’ll

frighten me; nor yet cry out, because you'll alarm the house. But the truth is," continued the abigail, her tone suddenly becoming serious and her manner solemn, "a man has died of apoplexy in Mrs. Brace's bedroom, and the corpse must be disposed of this very night."

"No! Is this possible, Harriet?" were the ejaculations which burst from the lips of the astounded Frederick Dray; but instantly perceiving how tremendous was the hold which the knowledge of such a secret gave him over Mrs. Brace, he hastened to observe, "My dear Harriet, I am ready to devote myself, body and soul, for our poor mis'sus — who promises five hundred and fifty guineas —"

"We must not waste time in chattering here, Fred," exclaimed the abigail. "Indeed, I have already been more than a quarter of an hour absent, and I promised to return in five minutes. So follow me in silence."

The footman started with alacrity to his feet; and Harriet led the way cautiously back to Mrs. Brace's bedchamber, into which she introduced her companion, closing the door with the utmost care.

The milliner, who had grown nervously impatient despite of the exhilarating influence of the brandy, was much pleased when she beheld the reappearance of her faithful abigail in company with the footman. Harriet, who knew her mistress well, immediately perceived that she had been seeking artificial courage in the bottle; but Frederick Dray was not a little astonished to observe that the milliner wore so cheerful a countenance under such horrifying and embarrassing circumstances.

However, there was little leisure for making observations with the eyes and none for expressing irrelevant ones with the lips; for Harriet hastened to inform her mistress that she had acquainted Frederick with what had happened, and that he was willing and ready to lend all the assistance in his power. Mrs. Brace thereupon opened the door of the bathroom, and, taking the light in her hand, entered that place where the corpse of Peter Grumley was lying.

A cold tremor passed over Harriet's frame, and she averted her eyes shudderingly as Frederick Dray calmly and deliberately proceeded to remove the cloth which the milliner had thrown over the face of the dead body.

"Why, it's the Bow Street officer, I declare!" exclaimed

the footman, after surveying the livid countenance of the murdered man; and he turned his eyes with an expression of mingled amazement and incredulity upon Mrs. Brace, his looks and manner both implying a suspicion that there was something more in this affair than had been communicated to him.

"Come, we have no time to lose," said Mrs. Brace, with a full recurrence of all that nervous trepidation which she had chased away by means of the brandy. "The money I have promised you is in the man's pockets; you can secure it at once," she hastened to observe, for she did not altogether like the looks which Frederick Dray had thrown upon her, and her guilty conscience naturally suggested the idea that he had penetrated the secret of the murder.

"Here is the money, safe enough," said he, after searching the dead man's pockets; and securing the bank-notes about his own person, he demanded of Mrs. Brace whether she had any settled plan respecting the disposal of the corpse.

"My idea was to bury it beneath the pavement in the back kitchen," responded the milliner.

"Capital!" ejaculated Dray. "It is the best course to adopt, and, singular enough, the dustman left his shovel by accident behind him a few days ago and has never called for it since. Come, lend me a hand with the body, and we will carry him down-stairs as gently as possible."

Thus speaking, the footman raised the corpse up to a sitting posture; and, stooping down behind it, he wound his arms about the burly form, while Harriet, who had by this time regained her presence of mind, lifted up the feet. Mrs. Brace threw the cloth once more over the head of her victim; and, carrying the light in her hand, she led the way from the bathroom.

Through her bedchamber was the corpse thus borne, and down the stairs was it conveyed as noiselessly as possible. Frederick Dray was a young man of extraordinary strength and muscular power; and he sustained nearly the entire weight of the heavy, inanimate mass of human clay, Harriet merely supporting the feet in the descent. Often did they pause to listen whether any one besides themselves was moving in the house; and sometimes, when the staircase creaked or Frederick unavoidably staggered against the balusters, a mortal terror struck to the hearts of the two

women lest the whole dwelling should be alarmed by the sounds. As for the footman himself, he took the entire proceeding with remarkable coolness and managed it in such a perfectly businesslike way that had he been a resurrection-man he could not have exhibited a more complete indifference at the handling of a dead body. But although this cold and imperturbable disposition was the very one to enlist in such a matter, it was likewise that which was most to be dreaded afterward; and this idea struck like a pang to the brain of Mrs. Brace as she led the way with the candle in her hand.

At length the bottom of the staircase was reached, and now the descent of the flight leading to the kitchen was begun. This was more difficult, because the steps were precipitate; but in a few minutes the task was accomplished, and the corpse was deposited upon the pavement of the back kitchen.

A bottle of wine was now procured from the cellar, and, invigorated by the generous juice of the grape, Frederick resumed his labours. By means of a poker which was worn away almost to a point, he succeeded in raising one of the flagstones wherewith the back kitchen was paved; and the shovel which the dustman had left behind now became serviceable in digging out the earth. The young man toiled arduously, the perspiration streamed off him, and Mrs. Brace and Harriet, who watched him with profound interest, were both astonished at the progress which he made. From time to time he paused to rest and refresh himself with a glass of wine; and then, as if inspired by renewed fervour, he returned to his task with the resolute determination of a man working for a wager.

And Frederick Dray's thoughts were all the while as active as his arms. He knew that it only required one good chance in the life of a man to enable him to make his fortune; and such an opportunity had presented itself to him this night. The milliner was rich, and she was now completely in his power; for he had indeed penetrated as profoundly into the truth of the matter as she had feared and suspected. But he toiled hard to clear away all traces of her crime, because it was by no means consistent with his own interests that it should be brought to light. On the contrary, it was a secret which he was most anxious to surround with as

many defences as possible, so that he alone should be enabled to hold it in terror over the head of the unhappy woman.

Such were his reflections as he plied the spade with all the vigour of his muscular arms; but the task was by no means an easy one. For the soil was very hard, he had not the requisite implements to break it up ere he shovelled it out, and it was, moreover, necessary to dig to a great depth in order that a sufficiency of earth might cover the corpse so as to prevent any disagreeable odour from exhaling hereafter.

Three hours therefore elapsed before the grave was hollowed to receive the murdered man, — three mortal hours, during which both Mrs. Brace and Harriet passed through all the torturing transitions of lively alarm, cold terror, profound apprehension, and awful suspense. Sometimes they fancied they heard noises in the house, — footsteps descending the stairs, persons breathing in the passage communicating with the front kitchen, or windows opening in the upper rooms; and then their hair almost stood on end and the perspiration burst forth in large and ice-cold drops upon their foreheads. At other moments they would goad themselves to desperation with the thought that Frederick could not possibly complete his task before morning; that even if he were able, the trace of the deed would not be altogether annihilated; that some clue must inevitably remain, and that detection was sure to follow. Then Mrs. Brace, on the one hand, fancied that she already found herself arraigned at the bar of justice as a murderess; while Harriet in imagination saw herself accused as an accessory after the fact. For although the abigail believed her mistress's representation that the constable had died of apoplexy, she nevertheless knew full well that were the corpse discovered in the grave which Frederick was digging to receive it, the dread cry of murder would be instantaneously raised.

Yes, three mortal hours thus passed, during which the murderess of mature age and the young woman in the bloom of youth were tortured with all the poignant imaginings of their fevered fancies. And they dared not express to each other how tensely their feelings were thus wrung, much less suffer Frederick Dray to observe how excruciating were their thoughts. For they were fearful of imparting their own terrors to him, thereby paralyzing the only arm which could

now work to save them; but the furtive glances which they stole at each other met at last and revealed to each how profoundly they were both suffering.

But at length the grave was dug, and the two women assisted Frederick to ascend from its depth. The corpse of the Bow Street officer was then rolled into the hole, and the young man addressed himself to the task of shovelling back the earth which he had thrown up in two great mounds, one on each side of the grave. Every now and then he leaped into the hollow to trample down the soil; and the nearer its surface grew toward the level of the pavement, the more easily did Mrs. Brace and Harriet appear to breathe.

The clock struck four as the footman trod down the last layer of earth; for the grave was now full, and still a large quantity of the soil remained heaped up by the side. But Frederick seemed fully prepared to encounter every embarrassment which presented itself, and such an one as this was naturally foreseen by him from the very first. Having procured a large sheet, he spread it out upon the floor, threw the superfluous soil upon it, gathered up the four corners, and thus converted it into a sort of sack, which he was enabled to carry upon his shoulders. He then passed cautiously out into the back yard, and emptied the contents of the sheet into the privy. This operation he had to perform three times before the whole of the superfluous soil was fully disposed of.

He was now well-nigh exhausted. The frequent applications he made to Mrs. Brace's excellent wine had hitherto sustained him throughout his arduous labours; but the effect of the artificial stimulant was beginning to produce a rapid reaction, and it was necessary to imbibe a considerable quantity ere he could muster energy sufficient to replace the huge stone over the mouth of the grave. This portion of the task was, however, accomplished at length; while Harriet compounded a mixture of white lead, sand, and earth, which she reduced by means of oil to the consistency of putty, and with which the flagstone was not only fixed in its setting, but the interstices were filled up.

The back-kitchen was now swept carefully with a carpet-broom; and Frederick walked several times over the stone, treading upon it in every point, to assure himself that it was firmly placed and did not tremble beneath the feet. The

result of this test was perfectly satisfactory; and thus had every trace of the crime disappeared.

The clock of St. James's church was striking five, as Mrs. Brace, Harriet, and Frederick Dray quitted the place where they had buried the corpse of the police-constable; and, retiring noiselessly to their respective chambers, they were all speedily plunged by sheer exhaustion into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE TWO NOBLEMEN

A WEEK had elapsed since the occurrences just related, and it was about eleven in the forenoon that the handsome but effeminate young Lord Florimel was seated in the breakfast-parlour at his elegant mansion in Piccadilly.

He was dressed in the negligent attire of a *robe-de-chambre* and slippers; and he was perusing a tender note which he had just received from Pauline Clarendon, who was still staying at the Duchess of Devonshire's villa near Aylesbury. The communication spoke favourably in respect to poor Octavia, and contained the most fervent assurances of the fair writer's unchanging love for the young nobleman.

Florimel was already in the midst of his second perusal of this note, when the door was opened gently and a black page entered the room.

This sable menial was apparently between fourteen and fifteen years of age. Of low stature and slender shape, his form was nevertheless of a symmetry alike elegant and graceful; and his movements were as noiseless as if he were an aerial being. Though his skin was as black as an African's, yet in his features had he nothing characteristic of the negro race. On the contrary, his hair, which was curled in a myriad small ringlets over his shoulders, was of silken fineness, and his facial outline was delicate and pretty. His eyes were large and sparkled with intelligence, and his beautiful teeth gleamed like pearls between the lips which were rather full, but of a lively red. His hands were delicate and even girlish in their appearance, for the fingers were long and exquisitely tapered, and the fine, almond-shaped nails were of a pellucid roseate tint.

But although the fire of intellect sparkled in the eyes of

this boy, who appeared to belong to some East Indian race, yet were his manners so subdued that it was impossible to converse with him many minutes without receiving the impression that he was either of a sullen and morose disposition, or that he had some profound grief preying upon his mind. He spoke English perfectly; but his replies were always given in the fewest words, and in monosyllables if possible. He was, nevertheless, active and willing in the performance of his duties; and there was something almost amounting to the mysterious in the manner in which he glided in and out of the rooms with his tread so light and noiseless.

Such was the strange but interesting boy that now entered the breakfast-parlour where Lord Florimel was seated; but he did not open his lips until the young nobleman, hearing the door close very gently, raised his eyes and beheld the sable page.

"Well, Rao?" he said, inquiringly.

"Lord Montgomery, may it please your lordship," returned the boy, in a low and silvery voice, his form bending slightly, but with a graceful inclination at the same time.

"Show his lordship in, Rao," exclaimed Florimel. "You should not have made him wait in the hall."

"I am sorry, my lord," responded the boy, in the same low, quiet, and harmonious voice; "and I will not do it again."

"You are a good youth, Rao," said the young nobleman, in a kind tone.

The black page acknowledged this compliment with a more perceptible inclination of his slender form; and, gliding from the room, he almost immediately returned to usher in Earl Montgomery.

This nobleman, whose name has already been more than once mentioned in our narrative, was about thirty years of age. His countenance was a perfect specimen of manly beauty, the facial outline being of the pure Greek form, and the fire of the large dark eyes being only subdued by the long jetty lashes which shaded them. His brows were grandly arched, and his fine forehead seemed fitted to serve as the throne of the noblest thoughts; but there was a certain expression about the mouth which somewhat nullified the effect of the upper part of the countenance. Yet

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that mouth was perfect as a feature, small, with lips neither too thin nor too full, and furnished with teeth white and pure as those of a charming woman. Nevertheless there was at times a certain curl, or rather, a mingled wreathing and compression of those lips, which gave a sinister look to the whole countenance, and thus marred the open, frank, and generous aspect of the noble forehead and the magnificent brows. It must, however, have been a tolerably acute observer to notice this effect; and thus to the world in general Lord Montgomery's countenance appeared to combine every essential to perfect manly beauty.

His hair was black, curling naturally, and shining with so rich a gloss of its own as to render needless the unguents of perfumers; and he possessed a superb pair of whiskers which were slightly tinged with a dark auburn at the roots, but speedily grew into a black as jetty and as bright as the hair. His stature was of the middling height, and his form combined graceful symmetry with muscular power. He dressed well, had a rich, melodious voice, sang an excellent song, was a famous horseman, had a taste for literature, and wrote beautiful poetry, danced gracefully, fenced admirably, was considered to be somewhat addicted to all kinds of fashionable dissipation, and was therefore a great favourite both with the male and female portions of the aristocratic world.

Such was Lord Montgomery, a British peer, with an estate tolerably well encumbered by mortgages, and whose signature was by no means unknown amongst the bill-discounters in the city; but he was wont to profess great confidence as to the lawsuit which was pending in Chancery with regard to the Bellenden estates, and in the result of which process he had no mean interest.

Rao, the black page, having duly ushered Lord Montgomery into the presence of his master, immediately retired, and the greetings which took place between the two noblemen indicated the very friendly terms whereon they stood with each other.

"We have been quite strangers lately, my dear Gabriel," said the earl, taking a seat; "and therefore I was resolved to call upon you thus early this morning, and have a friendly confabulation."

"No one could possibly be more welcome, Eugene,"

returned Florimel. "And how progresses the law-suit?"

"Favourably enough, I think, and, indeed, I hope," observed Lord Montgomery. "Heaven knows it is pretty nearly time that it should be decided in one way or another, considering that it has now lasted no less than thirty years."

"But how, in the name of common sense, can it have been thus protracted?" demanded Lord Florimel.

"In the first place, my dear friend," responded Montgomery, "every one knows that it is much more easy to get into Chancery than to get out of it. A more infamous tribunal never disgraced civilization, the Inquisition perhaps being alone excepted. Well, then, the delays of that accursed court have been the prominent and inevitable enemies against which we have had to contend. In the second place, there has been an almost endless trouble in settling the precise manner in which the suits were to be carried on; because there were numerous old wills to consult, pedigrees to examine, marriage settlements to rake up, certificates of birth to find, and registers of burial to ferret out, before it could be established who ought to be the exact claimants."

"But I thought that the suits were renewed, after a temporary suspension, by your mother on behalf of yourself and your brother Raymond, when you were both boys?" said Lord Florimel, inquiringly.

"Your surmise is substantially correct, my dear friend," returned Lord Montgomery. "The process was originally commenced by my father, thirty years ago, which was just about the time of my birth. My brother Raymond was born eight years later."

"What! is he only twenty-two at this moment?" exclaimed Florimel. "I thought he was at least a couple of years older; but then my acquaintance with him is very slight."

"Well, as I was observing," continued Lord Montgomery, hastily resuming the thread of his narrative, and not pausing to notice Florimel's remarks, "the suit had lasted eight years when my brother Raymond was born; and almost at the same time my father died. Then it was discovered that by some traditionary privilege or peculiarity of entail, the claim to the Warwickshire estates had become vested in

Raymond; while my own claims, although the elder son, regarded only the priory with its annexed property. Scarcely did the lawyers ferret out those facts from the depths of mouldy documents and musty pedigrees, when it suddenly transpired that the Aylmer family had likewise some vague and indistinct claims upon a portion of the Warwickshire property; and thus the whole affair presented a curious but not the less bewildering imbroglio."

"And all this time the Marquis of Bellenden was in possession and enjoyment of the whole property, was he not?" inquired Florimel.

"Precisely so," answered Montgomery; "and as he was an amorous old fellow of sixty-two, my mother hit upon a method of settling the law disputes amicably and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. She had an orphan niece dwelling with her, a beautiful girl named Laura; and she negotiated a marriage between this lovely creature and the sexagenarian Marquis of Bellenden. The alliance took place, and the documents were drawn up to the effect that, in default of male issue, all the disputed estates should become the property of our family at the death of the marquis, the Aylmers consenting to receive a sum of ready money as an inducement to waive all their claims. But, behold! the marquis died suddenly, before the deeds were signed, and confusion became worse confounded. The widowed marchioness, my beautiful cousin Laura, evinced so decided a spirit of her own that my mother could not bring her to any terms, nor induce her to listen to reason; and the lawsuits were accordingly renewed, as you just now expressed yourself, after the temporary suspension."

"And that renewal took place twenty years ago, did it not?" inquired Florimel.

"Yes, and consequently when I was ten years old and my brother Raymond two," said Earl Montgomery. "Our mother revived the process on our behalf; and its slow length has been dragged along until the present time, my cousin, the marchioness, fighting us step by step."

"Did the Aylmers renounce their claims upon that portion of the Warwickshire property to which they had considered themselves entitled?" asked Lord Florimel.

"The affairs of the Aylmer family soon afterward fell into such confusion," replied Eugene Montgomery, "and death

made such havoc amongst its members, that every claim seemed to be abandoned in that quarter; and the only representative of that family who was at last left was a female infant of whom the Earl of Desborough took charge. This child grew up — ”

“ Ah! your cousin, Fernanda Aylmer? ” exclaimed Lord Florimel.

“ Or rather Lady Holderness,” said Montgomery. “ Well, within the last few months she has asserted her right to the portion of the Warwickshire estates previously claimed by her family; and thus the Aylmers and Montgomerys are once more battling with the Bellendens. Do you now comprehend the position of this very intricate affair? ”

“ Perfectly, my dear friend,” answered Lord Florimel. “ You never explained it to me so lucidly and minutely before. But if you, your brother Raymond, and Lady Holderness all three succeed in these suits, the Marchioness of Bellenden will be completely stripped of all her possessions? ”

“ Except the income which she derives from a certain sum in the funds, and which produces her about two thousand a year,” said Lord Montgomery.

“ And do you really expect that you will all three succeed in the lawsuits? ” asked Florimel.

“ I confess that I am very sanguine,” returned Lord Montgomery. “ My brother Raymond’s rights to the Warwickshire estates are all but proven; and Fernanda will not experience much difficulty in making good the validity of her claims. But my case, which refers, you must remember, to the priory property, is a little more complex. However, the Lord Chancellor must decide upon the matter soon; and I shall be truly glad when all suspense is over.”

“ I can well believe you, my dear Eugene,” said Lord Florimel. “ For my part, I would not have a lawsuit for the world.”

“ And yet there are scarcely any title-deeds which do not contain some flaw or leave some opening for quibble and dispute,” observed Montgomery, “ Indeed, some persons hold and enjoy large estates without possessing any title-deeds at all; for through the habit of entrusting such documents to one’s solicitor, they are frequently lost or destroyed by accident.”

"And sometimes intentionally, no doubt," added Florimel. "But I keep all my papers and parchments in a tin box under my bed — Ah! what do you want, Rao?" demanded the young nobleman, suddenly interrupting himself to address that question to his black page, who had glided with his usual noiseless step into the room, where he had, indeed, remained unperceived for upwards of a minute.

The sable youth made no verbal reply, but handed his master a letter upon a silver salver; he then bowed and withdrew as silently as he had entered.

"How long have you had that page, Gabriel?" inquired Lord Montgomery, as soon as the door closed behind the object of this query.

"Only a week," answered the young nobleman.

"I hope you had good references with him," said Montgomery.

"Why so?" demanded Florimel, surprised at the observation.

"Oh, I don't know; 'twas an idea which entered my head at the time," exclaimed Montgomery. "But the truth is, I do not like that noiseless way of gliding imperceptibly in and out of a room; and that boy made me almost shudder at the moment, as if it were a black snake creeping in with so much sinister mystery."

"Such a prejudice against poor Rao is ridiculous, Eugene," cried Florimel, in a tone of remonstrance; "and if we were not intimate friends, I should really feel indignant at the unjust suspicion which your words imply."

"Well, let us change the subject, my dear fellow," said Montgomery. "What have you got there?" he inquired, as Florimel opened the letter which had been brought in.

"A card for a masquerade at Covent Garden Theatre," replied the young nobleman. "Who on earth could have sent me this?" he exclaimed, turning the card over and over in his hands.

"Is there nothing written inside the envelope?" asked Lord Montgomery.

"Nothing," said Florimel. "And the address outside is evidently penned in a feigned hand," he added, scrutinizing the superscription with attention. "But I have not the least knowledge of this writing, not the remotest suspicion —"

"And yet the writer must be afraid of her penmanship being detected," remarked Lord Montgomery; "or else wherefore should she attempt to disguise it?"

"It is strange, very strange," said Florimel, in a musing tone and with his eyes still fixed upon the envelope. "The handwriting is evidently that of a lady, who has tortured its natural fluency into a stiff and awkward scrawl."

"An intrigue is at the bottom of this proceeding," observed Lord Montgomery, "and you must go to the masquerade. Doubtless you have captivated the heart of some lady who mingles discretion with her gallantry and conducts her amours with precaution; and she has therefore adopted these means of obtaining an interview with you. For my part — But, by Jove! here is the black page again."

And Montgomery actually shuddered as he beheld Rao gliding noiselessly into the apartment, like a black spirit.

The boy stopped suddenly short as that ejaculation struck upon his ear; and his black eyes, after darting a keen and penetrating look upon the nobleman who had uttered it, swept toward Lord Florimel, on whose countenance they remained fixed for a few moments. Then, as if satisfied by this scrutiny or relieved from some apprehension which had started up in his mind, the sable youth resumed his noiseless course, and, approaching his master, he placed a large parcel upon the table before him.

"Well, Rao, what is this?" demanded Florimel, perceiving that the youth had something to say, but did not choose to speak until questioned.

"It was delivered, my lord, at the same time with the letter," said the boy, in his subdued tone of musical cadence, "but the hall-porter forgot to give it to me."

"And who brought the letter and this parcel?" inquired Florimel.

"A ticket-porter, who immediately departed, my lord," was the boy's response.

Rao then retired, Earl Montgomery following him with his eyes until he disappeared by the door, which it seemed he had a knack of opening and shutting in a manner as noiseless as his own footsteps.

"What have you got now, Gabriel?" inquired the earl, turning toward his young friend, who was opening the large brown paper parcel which had just been brought in.

"A blue domino, by Heaven!" ejaculated Florimel, unfolding the ample garment, which was edged with a peculiar braiding and had a sort of star made of the same material upon the crown of the hood.

"The fair unknown whose heart you have captivated," said Montgomery, "is determined that the adventure shall be as completely romantic and as well defended by judicious precautions as possible. You are to wear this domino in order that she may recognize you at the masquerade for which she has sent you a card; and the costume is purposely signalized with braiding in such a manner that no mistake may arise, even should there be a dozen blue dominos in the room. You are a fortunate fellow, Gabriel," added Montgomery; "for all these precautions, and the evident anxiety which exists to shroud the adventure in as profound a secrecy as possible, naturally lead us to infer that the fair unknown is some lady of exalted rank and untarnished reputation. Altogether, the intrigue promises to be of a piquancy sufficient to move an anchorite."

"And yet I shall not keep the appointment nor accept the overtures thus mysteriously made," said Lord Florimel, whose manner had gradually fallen into a strange abstraction.

"Not keep the appointment! Not accept the overtures!" echoed Montgomery, with the most unfeigned astonishment. "Are you in earnest, Florimel, or have you so little faith in my friendship and discretion that you are afraid I shall betray you to the beautiful Miss Pauline Clarendon?"

"Those are not my reasons, Eugene," said the young nobleman, in a very serious tone; "but I will unhesitatingly admit, even at the risk of being well laughed at by you, that I am resolved, indeed, I have sworn, never to commit an act of perfidy toward Pauline. Therefore, my dear Eugene, I shall not take any further notice of the overtures whereby I have been honoured; and if you really value my friendship, you will not make the slightest attempt to dissuade me from my purpose. Poor Pauline! she loves me so devotedly, and she has latterly experienced so much affliction on account of her father's inauspicious marriage and other circumstances of a domestic nature, that I could not find it in my heart to plunge headlong into this intrigue, even though I were certain that it would never reach her ears."

"After all you have said, my dear Gabriel," cried Lord

Montgomery, "I cannot do otherwise than respect your decision. At the same time, I most sincerely wish that such an adventure would offer itself to me. By Jove! nothing could be more amusing, nothing more exciting. I suppose you would not like the idea of allowing me to assume the blue domino and take your place at the approaching masquerade?"

"My dear Eugene, such a proposal is unworthy of you," said Lord Florimel, in a tone of grave remonstrance. "Would it be honourable to the lady in question, whoever she may be —"

"I was only joking, Gabriel," interrupted the earl, who nevertheless bit his lip with vexation. "Of course this is a secret which you must keep religiously and as a man of honour. But wherefore are you thus serious, and why is your air so preoccupied? There is evidently something on your mind besides the present topic of conversation."

"To speak candidly," said Lord Florimel, after nearly a minute's profound silence and deep meditation, "the overtures conveyed by that masquerade-ticket and the blue domino have reminded me of an adventure which occurred fifteen months ago, before my brother's sudden death conferred upon me the family title and estates. The adventure to which I allude was of a most extraordinary character; and I could not help just now associating it somewhat with the present overtures, although there is not any substantial ground to warrant the supposition that the lady concerned in the former affair is the same who has sent me the masquerade-card and the blue costume."

"And that adventure of which you are speaking," said Lord Montgomery, whose curiosity was excited, "is it a secret, or may I, without indiscretion, beg you to relate it?"

"I do not think that there can be any breach of honour on my part in making you acquainted with the singular occurrence," returned Florimel; "especially as no pledge of secrecy was exacted from me at the time, and no particular lady's reputation can possibly suffer by the narrative."

"Pray proceed; I am all attention," said Lord Montgomery, drawing his chair closer to that of his young friend.

"You are aware, my dear Eugene," began Florimel, "that as my late brother was unmarried and was of an exceedingly nervous temperament, I dwelt with him in this

house after I left college; and although he exercised a species of parental espionage over me, as he was so much older than myself, yet I deemed it a duty to bestow as much of my time and attention upon him as possible. One day we received an invitation to a grand entertainment which was to take place at Devonshire House; and much as my brother disliked the bustle, brilliancy, and splendid confusion of such fêtes, he nevertheless felt himself bound to be present at this one, inasmuch as her Grace of Devonshire is related to our family. Thither we accordingly repaired on the appointed evening; and the magnificent saloons were already crowded with the élite of fashion when we were announced. In a short time the heat of the rooms became overpowering, despite the vases of refreshing perfume which stood in the corners of the apartments, and the greenhouse plants and flowers which were profusely arranged around the landing-places and in the brilliantly lighted passages, for it was in the middle of winter that this entertainment was given. Toward midnight, my brother suffered so much from the intensity of the heat that he was compelled to return home the instant the carriage, which had been ordered to attend early, was announced; but he would not permit me to accompany him. On the contrary, he bade me remain and enjoy myself until the end; and he observed that although he should send back the carriage to wait for me, I need not be in any hurry on that account. I thanked him for his kind consideration, assisted him into the carriage, and then returned to the ballrooms, where I entered fully into the spirit of the scene. It was about two o'clock in the morning that the company began to break up; and then commenced in the adjacent streets all that confusion, noise, bustle, and din which invariably attend upon the vast muster of carriages on such an occasion. The hall and the grand entrance of the ducal mansion were crowded with the guests waiting for the announcement of their respective equipages; the footmen were bawling out for the carriages which were in requisition, the link-boys repeated the cries, the coachmen responded from all directions, and these vociferations were mingled with the crashing sounds of wheels and the trampings of horses' hoofs. At that moment there could not have been less than five or six hundred carriages in the vicinage of Devonshire House; and the arrangements to marshal and

muster them appeared to have been singularly neglected. I had undertaken to escort Lady Bonnycastle and her daughter; and, having after some difficulty succeeded in getting up their barouche to the gate, I had just handed them in and bowed the parting salutation, when, as their carriage was whirled away, another dashed up to the entrance. 'Who's next?' demanded the stentorian voice of the porter of Devonshire House. 'Lord Florimel's carriage,' replied a tall footman in dark livery, springing down from behind the vehicle which had just driven up and opening the door with alacrity. 'That is not my brother's carriage,' I exclaimed, the hasty glance which I threw at it convincing me there must be some mistake. 'All right, sir. This is for the Honourable Mr. Florimel,' said the tall footman in dark livery, touching his hat; and before I could utter another syllable or ask a word of explanation, I was lifted, as it were, by the fellow's vigorous arm up the steps into the vehicle, the door was banged, I became suddenly enveloped in total darkness, and the abrupt jerk with which the carriage whirled away threw me completely back upon the seat. At that moment my hand came in contact with the silken skirt of a female dress; and before even an ejaculation of astonishment could escape my lips, I was clasped in the arms of a lady whose warm cheek instantaneously came in contact with my own, whose bosom heaved against my chest, and whose voice, tremulous with mingled fervour and triumph, whispered in my ear, 'Fear nothing, Florimel, and pardon one who loves you.' Then, returning the ardour of the embrace in which I was so suddenly caught and so firmly locked, I gave back the impassioned kisses which were the next moment lavished upon me; and for many minutes not another word was spoken inside that vehicle."

"You gave back the kisses," said Lord Montgomery, laughing; "and it might have been some old woman who had adopted this stratagem to win you to her arms."

"Oh, believe me, my dear Eugene," exclaimed Florimel, "that although the darkness of the tomb prevailed within that carriage, for the wooden blinds were all drawn up, yet no sooner did I come in contact with that warm and glowing form, no sooner did I feel the firm, plump bosom heaving in its rich luxuriance against my breast, and no sooner did I taste, as it were, the luscious moisture of the lips and

drink in the fragrance of the balmy breath, oh, no sooner, I say, was I thus suddenly plunged into the sweets of paradise, than I became well aware that such raptures emanated only from the companionship of a most desirable woman. And abandoning myself to the thrilling and ecstatic feelings which were inspired alike by her impassioned ardour and by the charming novelty of this adventure, I became intoxicated, as it were, with the perfume of voluptuousness which stole upon my senses as a delicious dream sheds its influence upon the mind. Nothing could equal the intense fervour of those caresses which my companion lavished upon me in the midst of that pitchy darkness. Her kisses were long, burning, and devouring, as if she threw her whole soul into the profound sensuousness of her enjoyment. And when I gave back those caresses, she strained me to her bosom with all the indomitable fervour of her maddened desire, and with a violence which even hurt me, but which she had no power to control; while, beneath the influence of the kisses which I imprinted upon her lips, I felt her whole form twist, writhe, and undulate, as it were, in my arms like a silken cord that is shaken. For there was something even ferocious in the desires of that woman, something furious and raging in the headlong whirl of her passions."

"By Heaven! this is one of the most extraordinary adventures I ever heard," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "and if I did not know you so intimately, Gabriel, I should conceive that you were endeavouring to amuse me with a romance."

"I am telling you the exact truth, on my most solemn and sacred word of honour," returned Lord Florimel.

"Such an asseveration is quite unnecessary, my dear friend," said Montgomery. "But pray proceed with your narrative. I am dying to learn the result."

"For some minutes," resumed the young nobleman, "I gave myself up entirely to the voluptuous enjoyment of that strange and mysterious adventure, as a man in a dream resolves to drink his fill of those Elysian sweets into the midst of which his fancy wafts him. The darkness which prevailed was that of hell; but the pleasure which I enjoyed was that of paradise. And all this time the carriage was whirling rapidly along, and I neither cared nor took the trouble to conjecture whither it could be bearing me, or

what was to be the issue of my adventure. The intoxicating cup of ineffable bliss was at my lips; and I abandoned myself to the delirious ecstasies of the draught, without pausing to reflect whether poison was mingled with its sweets. At length I said, in a low murmuring whisper, — for there was such a deep and absorbing mystery in this adventure that it almost appeared to me as if loud speaking would break the spell of pleasure and disenchant the glowing vision, ‘Beautiful unknown,’ I said, ‘you have taught me the way to paradise; but the means you have adopted to entice me into this path of pleasure have been somewhat of the most extraordinary.’ ‘If then, dear Florimel,’ she replied, ‘you consider that you owe me any obligation for this adventure, the only recompense I demand is that you will seek no explanation from my lips, and that you will yield a ready assent to any little arrangement which I may deem necessary to ensure the continued envelopment of our amour in the deepest, darkest, most impenetrable mystery.’ And then she strained me with renewed fervour to her bosom and lavished upon me the tenderest caresses; and, inebriated by the floods of delight that were thus poured in unto my soul, I vowed, in the most solemn manner, to obey my fair unknown in all things, so long as she suffered me to enjoy the pleasure of her society. Soon afterward the carriage stopped; and the nature of the precautions to which she had alluded now became apparent, for she tied a silk handkerchief over my eyes before even the domestic had time to open the door of the vehicle. We then alighted; and guided by her fair hand, from which my own received a reassuring pressure every moment, I was led hastily forward. A gate closed behind us; on we went, and it struck me that we were threading the gravel walk of a garden or similar enclosure. In a couple of minutes we paused; my companion let go my hand for a moment. I heard a key turn in a lock, a door opened, my hand was again taken in the warm grasp that gave me a reassuring pressure, we entered some building, and once more did the lady pause to shut and fasten the door behind us. She then conducted me up a staircase so thickly carpeted that even the clumsiest boots and the heaviest footsteps must have passed noiselessly over it; and finally I was escorted along a passage into a chamber the atmosphere of which was warm and perfumed.”

"And the handkerchief was removed from your eyes, doubtless," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "and you beheld the charming heroine of your romantic adventure?"

"Oh, how erroneous are all your surmises, my dear friend," cried Lord Florimel. "What, do you suppose that all the precautions which had hitherto been adopted to steep this amour in the profoundest mystery were suddenly to cease and even be counteracted by allowing my eyes to gaze upon that woman who had studied to draw so impenetrable a veil around her frailty and screen her sensual enjoyments from the possibility of detection? No, no; the adventure progressed not in the manner which you have conjectured. The atmosphere of that chamber was warm, but the heat came from an invisible source, for there was neither fire nor lamp to throw even the faintest glimmer upon the pitchy darkness which prevailed in that boudoir of love and mystery. The handkerchief was indeed removed from my eyes; but there was not so much as a streak of light to indicate the position of the windows. No, the shutters must have been well closed or the curtains made of the thickest material; and yet the heat of the room was not stifling nor the atmosphere stagnant. It was a wholesome air, though warm and perfumed; and it seemed to breathe a soft sensuousness which made me picture to myself all the luxury of a chamber devoted to the mysteries of love. But I was not allowed much leisure for reflection or needless conjecture; for my companion conducted me to a sofa, on which we reclined ourselves, and an adjacent table supplied wine, a goblet of which she conveyed to my lips with her own hand. Then she led me toward a couch, and in a few minutes we were locked in each other's arms."

"Do you suppose that it was her own house, or some place which she had hired for the occasion?" asked Lord Montgomery, whose curiosity was piqued in a most lively manner.

"It is impossible to say," returned Florimel, "I am narrating to you everything just as the adventure occurred to me; and you are positively as capable of making your conjectures as I am myself. At all events, I may observe that the lady was familiar enough with every nook, corner, and detail of the chamber to which she had thus conducted me; and if it were not her own, it is very certain that she must have often visited it before. It was large, and evi-

dently furnished in a luxurious manner. The table stood between the sofa and the bed; and near the head of the bed there was a large armchair, in which I remember depositing my clothes. But it is useless to enter into these details, inasmuch as the whole adventure defies conjecture, and its mystery will most probably be never unravelled. That some lady of rank experienced a caprice with regard to myself, and adopted those means of gratifying her transitory whim, is tolerably certain; but that I shall ever learn who she is or discover the house to which I was conducted on that memorable night, I do not imagine for a moment. Her precautions were certainly adopted with admirable effect; and so confident was she in their success, that she did not even seek to bind me by oaths or promises to secrecy in respect to the adventure itself. But the very nature of the precautions which she had taken fully proved how imperious was the necessity for adopting them; and therefore we may safely suppose that it was some lady of no ordinary standing in society, or whose reputation was incalculably dear."

"And yet others must have been in her secret," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "for the coachman who drove her carriage and the footman in attendance upon it could not have done otherwise than obey special instructions; and, then, there was most likely a lady's-maid in her confidence also —"

"Those ideas have suggested themselves to me more than once," interrupted Lord Florimel; "and I confess that I have been lost in amazement and perplexity when I have reflected upon the astounding fact that the unknown lady must have risked exposure at the hands of her servants while adopting such immense precautions to screen her identity from her lover. She could not put confidence in me; but she placed herself at the mercy of her dependents."

"Strange inconsistency!" ejaculated Lord Montgomery. "But do you not remember the livery which her servants wore? Have you never since seen the same carriage? Could you obtain no information at Devonshire House whose equipage it was?"

"Your questions remind me, my dear Eugene," said Florimel, "that I have not yet made an end of my narrative. You will remember I informed you that it was about two

This is apparently depraved. I didn't see all, and didn't know the woman.

o'clock in the morning when I was precipitated, as it were, into the midst of that romantic adventure, as a man may be suddenly hurled from a rock to be received upon a bed of roses in the abyss beneath. Well, our ride to the unknown dwelling did not occupy more than twenty minutes, at the outside; and therefore by half-past two I was comfortably located in the voluptuous but dark boudoir. For about four hours did I there enjoy the companionship of the mysterious genius of the place. Oh, those four hours of intoxicating passion and Elysian ecstasy! Often and often have I since asked myself whether it was a delicious dream or a bewildering reality. And that it was the latter I am well assured: for who that had experienced the raptures which it was my blessed fortune to enjoy could possibly attribute them to a delusion? No, the thrilling ecstasy of those devouring kisses which were lavished upon me, the delicious contact of that full and voluptuous form which, naked and palpitating with the frenzied desires of a bacchanal, I clasped in my arms, the burning moments of pleasure which I tasted in the embrace of that woman who imparted all the electricity of her own maddening passions to the soul of her lover, oh, these were not the fantasies of a vision, but the never-to-be-forgotten experiences of such a night of love and mystery and voluptuousness as only occurs once in the lifetime of a man."

"I would give ten years of my own existence to have been the hero of this adventure," said Lord Montgomery, surveying his friend with the most unfeigned envy. "But let me hear the result, for I see that you have more yet to tell me."

"Indeed, the narrative is nearly brought to a close," returned Lord Florimel; "for at the expiration of the four hours, which glided away as if they were only as many minutes —"

"But how could you tell what time it was?" demanded Montgomery.

"Because a clock, apparently belonging to some adjacent church or chapel, chimed the half-hour," said Florimel, in explanation; "and then my fair companion murmured, in a plaintive voice, that it was half-past six and that we must separate. Literally tearing myself from her arms, I rose and put on my apparel in the dark, while she herself likewise resumed her clothing in a hurried manner. She then

blindfolded me once more, conducted me along the passage back to the staircase, which we descended, and thence led me forth into the enclosure, the gravel walk of which we threaded in a profound silence. But she held both my hands clasped in her own; and I guessed that her motive was to prevent me from raising the handkerchief surreptitiously from my eyes and thereby obtaining even that indistinct view of surrounding objects which may be sometimes procured between six and seven o'clock on a morning in the middle of winter. But I should not have attempted to penetrate her secret or solve the mystery of who she might be and where I was; no, I should not have moved the handkerchief a hair's breadth from my eyes, even if my hands had been free. For I experienced at the moment a boundless gratitude toward that lady who had chosen me as the object of her sensual fantasy and who had thereby led me to pass four hours and upwards in the paradise of her society. Therefore was it that when we passed out of the gate of the enclosure, and I knew by the sounds of horses champing their bits that a carriage was in attendance, therefore was it, I say, that I implored her in a deep and fervid whisper, to grant me an early repetition of the pleasure which I had enjoyed. 'Yes, dear Florimel,' she murmured, also in a voice tremulous with the reminiscences of recent delights, 'we will soon meet again. I shall not fail to adopt measures to bring you to my arms once more.' And then she pressed both my hands with ineffable tenderness; and in the next moment I was lifted, as it were, into the carriage, I have no doubt by the same vigorous arm which had performed a like feat at the gate of Devonshire House. The steps were raised rapidly, the door was closed with equal haste, and away, away was I whirled from the scene of that paradise of four hours' enjoyment."

"And then you tore off the bandage, you looked out of the carriage window —" exclaimed Montgomery, actually exciting himself by the strength of the interest wherewith he allowed his friend's narrative to carry him away.

"Indeed, I did no such thing," interrupted Florimel; "and even if I had so instantaneously torn off the handkerchief, the proceeding would have been useless, as you shall presently learn. But the truth is that the moment I was thrown, as it were, upon the soft cushions of the carriage

by that powerful arm which I had no doubt belonged to the tall lackey who had previously served me in the same manner, I fell into a deep but delicious reverie, in which I feasted my imagination with all the delights that I had just been enjoying in such blessed reality. At length I bethought myself that I was blindfolded; and starting from my profound meditations, I took off the handkerchief. The interior of the vehicle was of pitchy darkness, and I therefore knew that the wooden blinds must be drawn up. I endeavoured to open the one nearest to me, but it was fastened in its setting. I tried the one belonging to the other door, and my attempt was equally ineffectual. I felt in front of the carriage, but it was a barouche and had no windows there at all. Thus, my dear friend, do you perceive how completely baffled I should have been had I obeyed any sudden impulse of the kind which you imagined to have seized upon me the moment I entered the vehicle. You likewise see how complete, how effectual, and yet how simple were the precautions adopted by that lady to screen herself from the knowledge of the man whom her fantasy had made the partner of her bed for four short hours."

"The whole narrative is a perfect romance," exclaimed Montgomery, — "I mean, in the intensity of its interest."

"Yes, and that interest is the more absorbing," said Florimel, "because the romance itself is one of real life. But I was going to bring my tale to a conclusion, and this can now be done in a few words. For in about twenty minutes from the time that I reëntered the carriage in the manner I have described, it stopped, and the door was opened by a tall man. But he was dressed in plain clothes, and the broad brim of his hat completely shaded his countenance; so that, in fact, he was not recognizable in the dim twilight of the misty winter morning. A sudden impulse prompted me to retain possession of the handkerchief which had blindfolded my eyes and which might serve as a clue; but scarcely was the idea formed than it was discarded as mean, paltry, and contemptible to a degree. Moreover, I experienced an instinctive feeling that by leaving it behind me in the vehicle, it would be regarded with all the significance of a guarantee to the lady that I did not seek any unfair means of penetrating into that secret around which she had thrown the defences of so many precautions. These

thoughts passed rapidly as lightning through my brain at the instant that the door was opened; and springing forth from the carriage, I instinctively gazed up at the house to see where it was that it had stopped. That rapid glance showed me that I had been put down at the door of my own home; but it was not so rapid as to be able to turn and take a deliberate survey of the carriage which had brought me thither. For, as I looked around, the barouche was already dashing away, and in another moment it was lost to my view in the obscurity which still prevailed."

"But you caught a glimpse of the colour of that carriage?" exclaimed Lord Montgomery, inquiringly; "and you noticed whether there were armorial bearings upon the panels?"

"So far from having made any such observations," responded Florimel, "I should not have known the vehicle again had I met it an hour afterward. Nor would you have manifested a greater keenness of perception, had you been in my place; for when I was first thrust into the carriage at the gate of Devonshire House, the proceeding was so rapid and my confusion was so great that I had scarcely an instant to notice anything; and again, when I alighted from the vehicle at the door of my own home, it glided away into the mist of the morning quick as the glance which I sent after it. But if I dared hazard an opinion upon the subject, and if the slightest reminiscence did really remain on the point, then I should say that, from the rapid and imperfect view which I had of the carriage when I was thrown, as it were, into it at the gate of Devonshire House, that it was a plain one and of a dark colour. But this may be all conjecture, and most likely is. I have now little more to say, and yet I will not omit a single detail, since you appear to be so interested in the narrative."

"I am indeed interested," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "for it is altogether one of the most exciting, thrilling, and piquant adventures that I ever heard. But you had reached that point where you alighted from the carriage and it disappeared with such rapidity. What happened next?"

"Nothing very remarkable," returned Florimel, laughing. "I went up-stairs and sought my couch, where I slept soundly until the afternoon. I then rose, dressed myself, and descended to the breakfast-parlour, where I found my brother reading the newspaper. 'I hope you enjoyed your-

self, Gabriel?' he said, in a somewhat severe tone, as he eyed me suspiciously. 'Very much,' I answered, wondering what was uppermost in his mind. 'But why did you send word that the carriage was not to return and fetch you away?' he demanded, fixing his looks keenly upon me. I started in amazement, for I had sent no such message at all. But the truth flashed to my mind in an instant; and I comprehended that my fair unknown must have been the authoress of that message countermanding my brother's carriage in order that hers might take its place and perform its part, as indeed it had so effectually done. 'You have been in bad company, Gabriel,' continued my brother, observing the changing colour of my cheeks and the emotion of my manner, and utterly mistaking the cause. Nor did I choose to enlighten him upon the subject, but I allowed him to read me a long lecture on the impropriety of staying out until seven o'clock in the morning, and when he had concluded, I hastened off to call at Devonshire House. For I will candidly confess that an invincible feeling of curiosity had by this time sprung up within me, subduing the chivalrous resolves which I had previously made never to seek to penetrate the mystery of the night's adventure; and, under the plea of leaving my card at the ducal residence, I made certain inquiries of the gatekeeper and the hall-porter, who had superintended the marshalling of the carriages when the party broke up. Those inquiries I of course instituted in a very guarded manner; and I was even enabled, in consequence of my intimacy and relationship with the duchess, to question some of the footmen and pages belonging to the ducal establishment. No one, however, recollected the particular incident of a strange carriage taking me up; and, in fine, I could glean in that quarter nothing at all calculated to throw any light upon the subject. Fifteen months have elapsed since that period, and I am still as much in the dark as ever."

"Then your fair unknown never fulfilled her promise of contriving another interview?" exclaimed Lord Montgomery.

"Never," replied Florimel.

"Again do I pronounce the adventure to be one full of the most charming romance," said the earl, "and I am not surprised that it should have been so vividly recalled to

your memory by the unmistakable overtures conveyed to you this morning by means of the masquerade-ticket and the blue domino. Depend upon it, Florimel, your mysterious unknown has adopted this method to obtain another interview; and you cannot possibly forego the pleasure — ”

“ I have already besought you as a friend, Eugene,” said the young nobleman, in a serious tone, “ not to tempt me from that allegiance which I am so anxious to maintain toward my beloved Pauline.”

“ Then you are determined not to accept the invitation to that masquerade? ” exclaimed Lord Montgomery. “ In a word, you will not go? ”

“ No, ten thousand times, no,” answered Florimel. “ I have done so many foolish things in my life that I may as well endeavour for once to do a wise one; and I have broken so many solemn pledges that I am resolved to adhere faithfully to at least one promise at last. Do not, however, think that I cheerfully resign the chance of meeting my fair unknown again, if from her this card and this domino do really come. On the contrary, it will cost me a pang, but I shall feel more satisfied with myself afterward.”

Thus speaking, Lord Florimel tore up the masquerade-ticket and tossed the pieces into the fire; and he then rang the bell.

Rao, the sable page, instantaneously glided into the room.

“ Take this domino, my boy,” said Florimel, “ and burn it in the kitchen fire. I have particular reasons for wishing that this should be done immediately.”

As Lord Florimel gave utterance to this singular command, Lord Montgomery started with evident uneasiness, and even stretched out his hand toward the domino as if in obedience to a sudden impulse prompting him to save it from the destruction to which it had just been doomed. At the same moment the black page laid his own hand on the garment; and Montgomery caught the rapid, piercing glance which Rao threw upon him.

“ Let the boy take the domino, Eugene,” said Florimel. “ Do not attempt to change my purpose, I implore you. When the domino is once destroyed, it will be too late for me to alter my mind, even if the weakness of my nature should prevail.”

“ Be it so,” exclaimed Lord Montgomery, scarcely able

to restrain his vexation; and once more he caught the eyes of Rao fixed upon him with a significancy which he could not, however, fathom.

But the next moment the boy glided away with the domino; and Montgomery rose to take his leave.

"By the bye, have you seen our buxom and agreeable friend, Mrs. Brace, lately?" inquired Lord Florimel.

"Not very long ago," answered Montgomery. "Indeed, to tell you the candid truth, I passed the night in her society."

"In her arms, you mean," said Florimel, laughing.

"I do not deny the soft imputation," rejoined Montgomery. "But I do not think that she will ever again be honoured with my company in the same manner."

"And why so?" demanded Florimel. "Have you grown weary of her *tête-à-tête* suppers and buxom charms?"

"Not exactly," responded Montgomery. "But a little incident happened on the last occasion, rather a disagreeable occurrence, indeed, in some respects — However, I must not reveal the secrets of a gallant woman," he exclaimed, hastily interrupting himself. "So farewell, my dear friend."

"Farewell," said the young nobleman.

Lord Montgomery took his departure; but as he was passing through the hall of Florimel's mansion, he observed the sable page Rao standing in a window-recess, and evidently watching him with an interest more profound and definite than that of mere curiosity. But two or three liveried lackeys were lounging about in the place, and a footman was ceremoniously preceding Lord Montgomery toward the front door, which the hall-porter had already opened; and therefore the earl was more than half-inclined to disobey a sudden impulse which now prompted him to address the boy.

But still perceiving that Rao's eyes were following him with a strange significancy, he could no longer resist the secret and almost mysterious influence which urged him to address the lad. He accordingly stepped up to him, and said, in a laughing manner, "Well, Rao, have you burned the domino?"

The boy's large black eyes swept rapidly around the hall, for the evident purpose of ascertaining whether any of the domestics might be within ear-shot; and satisfied with the

result of that glance of lightning speed, he fixed his looks with a peculiar expression of deep meaning upon Earl Montgomery, saying, "Did your lordship really wish that I should destroy the blue domino?"

The nobleman started and blushed, for he felt that the boy had read the secret thoughts which animated him respecting the masquerade; but the next moment it struck him that Rao's words might only mean a piece of covert impudence, and nothing more.

"You were compelled to obey your master's orders, doubtless," the earl accordingly said, in a vague manner; "but it was a pity, all the same."

"Ah! your lordship thinks that it was a pity?" murmured Rao, darting upon him a look which seemed to penetrate into the profoundest recesses of his soul. Then, in a tone of unmistakable significancy, he added, "But suppose that I had disobeyed my master's commands, would your lordship think the worse of me for it?"

"There is some hidden meaning in your looks and words, boy," returned Lord Montgomery, "and we cannot converse any longer in this place. Call upon me in the evening in Grafton Street."

"Yes, at nine o'clock punctually," observed Rao; and he glided rapidly away from the window recess, scarcely appearing to touch the checkered marble pavement of the hall with his feet, so light was his tread and so glancingly went his steps.

The preceding dialogue occupied scarcely a minute, although we have taken several to narrate it; and not a syllable was overheard by the other domestics present. Nor were they surprised to behold Lord Montgomery stopping to address a few words to the black page, inasmuch as the boy had already attracted the notice and won the interest of every visitor to his master's mansion.

The earl quitted the house, and returned to his own abode in Grafton Street, where he resided with his mother, the dowager-countess.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BEGGAR'S STAFF AGAIN

RETURN we once more to that sink of iniquity in Horslydown, to which we have already familiarly introduced our readers, and which was known by the sign of the Beggar's Staff.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening; and the long, low, ill-lighted room was filled with company, — such company as was wont to frequent the place, and which consisted of bad characters of both sexes, all ages, and every variety of description.

The observer of human nature and the moralist would indeed have found food for earnest meditation in that apartment; for there might have been seen utter misery hardened into inveterate vice, ineffable suffering changed into complete demoralization, and all those phases of debauchery, profligacy, and loathsome wantonness which become apparent in the drunken orgies of society's outcasts. But had the tale of each and all of those ruffian-like men and those profligate women been ascertained with a perfect accuracy of detail, it would have assuredly transpired that not one single individual was naturally depraved from the cradle, but that all had become the miserable victims of tyrannical laws, the vitiated institutions of an artificial society, the ignorance of legislators, or the downright despotism of rich monopolists or titled plunderers.

For, oh, to talk of the freedom of Englishmen and the happiness enjoyed by "true Britons" is the most despicable farce and the most hideous mockery in the world. That freedom is a delusion, that happiness is a lie. The millions in this land are as utterly the minions of the aristocracy as Russian serfs are held at the mercy of their masters. The

white slavery of England is a truth more real, more terrible, and more tremendous than the black slavery of the Southern States of the American Union. Oh, better, better far to be a negro in a Virginian plantation than a "free-born" peasant on an estate in England; and more preferable is the condition of the purchased African at New Orleans than that of the mechanic of Manchester. For what is the spectacle which Great Britain, with its monarchical and aristocratic institutions, presents to the view? An absolute idolatry and the most servile worship paid to royalty and aristocracy on the one hand; while royalty and aristocracy, on the other, reward the sycophantic sentiment by testifying the most sovereign contempt for those who thus crouch at their feet. And to extend the picture, we have two millions of paupers and only one million of voters, more pawnbrokers than butchers, more gin-shops than bakers, and almost as many prisons and workhouses as churches. O blessed land of freedom, where such is the aspect presented to the eye. But this is not all; for in our agricultural districts we behold the peasant cheerless, sickly, half-starved, and feeble in the field, and our artisans pining and wasting with want in the factory. Our rural labourers dwell in the most wretched huts imaginable, while the industrious population of our cities and towns are crowded into hovels, and attics and cellars and cells with Pestilence for their companion.

No, Great Britain is not free; nor are her institutions good, nor her government just, nor her social system humane. The millions are in bondage, the institutions are worn out, the government is selfish and corrupt, and the social system is rotten to its very core. True, we have enormous wealth in the country; but those who produce it are starving! True, we have all the outward and visible signs of a consummate prosperity; but it is the luxuriousness which prevailed at Rome on the eve of her downfall, and amongst the Moors of Granada when the enemy was at their gates. The mocking edifice which fools and rogues call our Temple of Liberty is built upon the bosom of pauperism, and is surrounded by the gibbet, the chain, the hulk, the treadmill, and the spies of the law-officers of the Crown. Oh, what can we think of an institution which requires such sentinels and scarecrows to keep off those who will not content themselves with surveying it from the distance, but are venturesome

enough to approach its walls in order to ascertain by close inspection whether it be really as solid, as faultless, and as beautiful as the lying tongues of sycophants, place-men, sinecurists, and pensioners have proclaimed it to be.

One word more upon this subject. In this country we have illimitable luxury for a few and a misery as boundless for the many; we have the most gorgeous palaces overlooking the filthiest hovels, which the dwellers in those mansions would not have as sties for their pigs; we have the horses and dogs of the royal family better cared for, better lodged, and better fed than the human sons and daughters of toil; we have royal, aristocratic, and civic processions and festivals, where diamonds glitter like a galaxy of stars, while the countenances of the gazing multitudes are haggard with want, misery, and vice; we have families in whom vast estates are entailed, thus anticipating the property of the future, and others in whom appalling destitution is as certain a heritage, thus ensuring the sorrows of the future; in fine, we have a pampered aristocracy rolling in riches and revelling in luxury, and we have millions of honest, hard-working, meritorious people who are clothed in rags and can scarcely get a morsel of bread to eat.

Now, then, gentle reader, tell us, and tell us truly, is Great Britain free? Are Britons happy and prosperous?

And now to resume our tale.

We said that it was about seven o'clock in the evening; and the candles were lighted in the public-room at the Beggar's Staff. A blazing fire roared half-way up the wide-mouth chimney; and the heat therefrom was increased by the vapour which steamed from fifty pipes, and which impregnated the stifling atmosphere with the sickly odour of tobacco. Within the bar stood Carrotty Poll, serving the customers and rigidly enforcing the rhythmical injunction painted over the door leading into the parlour. Her appearance was more untidy and slattern-like than ever; her flaming red hair was in a disorder so complete that it resembled a bundle of tow, and was as deficient in arrangement as a new mop; and her gown was all open in front, displaying the scraggy neck and chest, the skin of which resembled dirty tallow.

In her avocations she was assisted by the slipshod waiter of whom mention has been before made in our narrative;

and whenever she had a moment's leisure, she passed into the little parlour, where she indulged in a whispered chat with some friend who was seated there, until the wants of the next customer called her forth again into the bar enclosure.

Matters were progressing in the usual way at the Beggar's Staff on the special evening in question; that is to say, there was no deficiency of obscene jesting, coarse conversation, smutty songs, and savage quarrelling; no deficiency either in coin to procure the alcoholic poison which makes depravity more depraved, vice more hardened, wantonness more brazen, and crime more desperate. In some cases the men were sitting with prostitutes upon their knees; in others, they were literally reclining in the arms of the loose women whose half-naked forms glowed ruddy in the lurid light of the fire; while a few young girls of tender age were sitting together in a group, each apparently straining every effort and racking her invention to the utmost to talk in a style more libidinous and filthy than the rest.

While the inmates of the public-room at the Beggar's Staff were thus diverting themselves after their own fashion, a man, muffled up in a drab greatcoat and wearing an ample woollen comforter around his neck, entered the pandemonium. His hat was slouched over his eyes, he carried a short but stout ash stick in his hand, and an ugly mongrel followed at his heels.

The moment this individual made his appearance, a sudden damp seemed to fall upon the company, for to the experienced eyes of the frequenters of the Beggar's Staff there was every indication of the Bow Street runner about that man. Nor was the conjecture erroneous; for, as he walked in a free and easy fashion up to the bar, he pushed his hat somewhat back from over his face, and the well-known features of Mr. Mobbs were immediately recognized not only by Carrotty Poll herself, but also by the greater portion of the company present.

"I don't come officially, my dear," he hastened to observe, in a loud tone, to the Big Beggarman's daughter; and the announcement instantaneously allayed the suddenly excited apprehensions of many whose consciences were not so clear but that they fancied it quite possible that they might be "wanted."

"Well, Mr. Mobbs, we're always glad to see you in a friendly way, you know," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, rendering her vixenish voice as soothing and her manner as cordial as she possibly could. "Perhaps you'll walk around," she added, after a few moments' pause, during which she knew that the person who was in the little parlour had retired into concealment.

"Thank'ee, Miss Price," said Mobbs, accepting the invitation. "I do want to have a word or two with you in private," he observed, as he walked leisurely behind the counter and entered the snugery.

"Wait one minute, Mr. Mobbs," exclaimed the red-haired young woman, "and I will be with you. Let me see, what spirits do you like? Oh, rum — I remember — so it is," she added, taking down a bottle from the shelf; and then, arming herself likewise with a jug of hot water, a tumbler, and a sugar-basin, she followed the dreaded individual into the little parlour.

"Shut the door, miss, please," said Mobbs, as he snuffed the solitary tallow candle, which burned with a dim and sickly light even in that little place. "Have you heard from your father lately, miss?"

"Well, that's a pretty question coming from a Bow Street officer," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, affecting a jocose laugh, but in reality not much liking the query, inasmuch as she was instantly seized with the apprehension that her sire had been captured, and that Mobbs was come to break the tidings to her.

"'Pon my soul, I only made the remark out of politeness," said Mobbs, in a reassuring tone. "Of course I know your guv'nor is out of the way, and though I had a hand in taking him, in the first instance, it was o'ny in the way of dooty and not through any disrespect toward him. Quite t'other; for me and the Big Beggarman has had many a glass together —"

"Well, I'll tell you this much, Mr. Mobbs," interrupted Carrotty Poll, who was now satisfied that the man's visit to the Beggar's Staff did not regard her sire: "I know no more where my father is at this moment than you do, and I'm precious uneasy about him, into the bargain. But what's brought you over to the Staff this evening?" she inquired, as she placed before Mobbs the reeking glass

of rum punch which she had just mixed for his special behoof.

"I've already told you it isn't official, nor more it is," responded the man, taking off his hat and comforter, and unbuttoning his drab coat; "but it's what may be called semiofficial," he added, with a chuckle, as if he had given utterance to a very witty thing.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Mobbs," observed Carrotty Poll, again experiencing an uneasy sensation on account of the ambiguity of the fellow's remark.

"Well, what I mean is soon explained, miss," rejoined Mobbs; "and the long and the short of the matter is that I'm no more a constable at this moment than you are, but that I've come here to see if I can obtain any clue to the unravelling of a partickler business, so that I may get restored to my situation."

"Then you're suspended, Mr. Mobbs?" said Poll, inquiringly.

"Just so," was the answer; "and consekvently my visit is only half-official, as the saying is."

"Well, but what is the business about?" demanded the red-haired young woman, somewhat snappishly, for her courage came back, and with it a portion of her natural ill-temper, when she learned that Mobbs was no longer dangerous nor terrible.

"The fact is," said the individual, "you've no doubt heard how a certain Caroline Walters gave me and Grumley the slip a week ago —"

"Yes, she jumped out of the window and drowned herself," interrupted Carrotty Poll. "At least, so we heard it reported in Horslydown."

"Well, the rumour was tolerably correct," continued Mobbs; "but ever since the very night of that occurrence Grumley has been missing, in a most unaccountable manner, and so the magistrates naturally suspect that he's bolted on account of that affair."

"P'raps they don't believe the story of the young woman's leap from the window in order to commit suicide?" observed Carrotty Poll.

"You've just hit it, miss," exclaimed Mobbs. "The disappearance of Grumley has thrown suspicion on the whole affair, and the authorities will have it that me and

him was bribed to let the prisoner, Caroline Walters, escape. So I am suspended until such time as the matter can be cleared up saytisfactorily."

"But how do you hope to gain any clue at the Staff to your friend Grumley's proceedings?" demanded Carrotty Poll, with an acerbity which she scarcely took the trouble to conceal. "Remember, Mr. Mobbs, that I for one have no reason to be grateful either to you or Mr. Grumley for nabbing my father —"

"Quite in the way of business, my dear," interrupted Mobbs; "and remember that although I am suspended now, I may soon be restored to my post, and I shall not fail to mark them as treats me with incivility while I'm under the cloud."

"I'm sure I wouldn't treat you with incivility for the world, Mr. Mobbs," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, understanding the significancy and feeling the force of the implied menace. "But pray do tell me what information you hoped to obtain at the Staff?" she inquired, with renewed mildness of tone and manner.

"Why, to speak plain, miss," said Mobbs, after a few moments' deep rumination, "I've been weighing in my mind this business of Grumley's sudden disappearance, and the longer I think of it, the more I'm convinced that he's made himself scarce for certain reasons."

"Ah! I begin to understand," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, whose shrewdness enabled her to detect the rancour which was lurking at the bottom of the man's mind in respect to his late superior in office. "Mr. Grumley hasn't behaved well toward you in respect to your share of the proceeds of some transaction — p'raps this very affair of Caroline Walters's suicide," she added, with a significant leer.

"Well, well," said Mobbs, laughing, "it's likely enough you ain't far wide of the mark, miss."

"And so Grumley has really cheated you out of your regu-lars?" observed Carrotty Poll, in a musing tone. "I shouldn't have thought him capable of it."

"Neither did I," rejoined Mobbs. "But there's no saying what may happen in this world, or what a man may do. Howsomever, it's of no use to waste walyable time in idle obserwations; and so I'll just tell you at once what I want with you and why I come to the Staff to-night. That Grum-

ley has made himself scarce, I'm pretty sure, and that he's got a large sum of money in his possession, there's no doubt. Now, such a man won't leave London; I know his habits too well for that. He'll keep quiet till the affair about Caroline Walters has blowed over; and then he'll either manage to make his peace with the authorities, or else set up in business as a thief-catcher on his own account. But he sha'n't bilk me in no such a fashion; and therefore I'm resolved to ferret him out. If so be, then, you'll help me, I'll make it well worth your while; for I'll give you fifty guineas for any such information as may enable me to unkenel the old fox, and, what's more, I'll take care that in future you shall always have a private hint conveyed to you when anything disagreeable turns up respecting the frequenters of the Staff. Now then, do you understand me, and can we strike a bargain? "

"I think we may," replied Carrotty Poll. "And if any one in London can obtain a trace of Grumley's retreat, that person is myself, for there isn't a soul frequenting the Staff that won't be upon the lookout when I give the word."

"That's exactly what I thought," said Mobbs; "and as Grumley is very naturally detested by all your folks, they'll be glad to do him an ill turn."

"No doubt," observed Carrotty Poll. "But suppose he should return to Bow Street and make his peace with the authorities, won't he remember me for any evil office that I may have done him? "

"How should he know anythink about it?" demanded Mobbs. "Come, Miss Price, there's no need of being timid in the matter, as I mean fair play on my part."

"But how am I to know, Mr. Mobbs," said Carrotty Poll, "that all this isn't some sly plant on your part, for some purpose or another? "

"Lord bless ye, my dear," exclaimed the ill-looking fellow, endeavouring to appear as amiable as possible, "what object can I have to serve in all this, except the one I've explained to you? But, to convince you that I'm in earnest, and indeed to place myself somewhat in your power, I'll tell you openly and candidly at once that the whole business about Caroline Walters's leap from the winder was a put-up affair on the part of Grumley and me; and a certain fashionable milliner at the West End, whose

name shall be nameless, was the person which instigated us to get the young gal off in some fashion or another. Well, we was to have five hundred guineas for the job; and as soon as it was done, — indeed, on the very night that the leap from the winder took place, — Grumley called on the milliner aforesaid to receive the blunt. I went with him as far as the door of her house; and he said enough to let me know that he was rayther in love with her, for she's a very handsome woman. Well, there we parted; and from that moment I've never clapped eyes on him again. Next morning I called on the lady, that is to say, the milliner, and she assured me he didn't remain with her above ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, at the outside. She likewise told me that she had paid him the five hundred guineas, and she gave me fifty for myself. I then took my departure; and now, Miss Price, you see how matters stand, and you will believe that I am in earnest in everythink I am saying or doing."

"Yes, I believe you now, Mr. Mobbs," answered Carrotty Poll; "but you will excuse me if I was rather suspicious at first?"

"Don't mention it, my dear," said Mobbs. "We have now come to an understanding together —"

At this moment the low door at the end of the little room was opened suddenly, and the Gallows' Widow made her appearance.

"I've overheard every syllable that has passed between you," she exclaimed; "and I think I can add some important information to what you already know concerning your friend Grumley," she added, fixing her eyes upon Mobbs.

"Indeed!" ejaculated Carrotty Poll. "Then you'll share the fifty guineas with me, Lizzy, if you earn them?"

"Yes, yes," said the Gallows' Widow; "I always act fair toward my pals."

"But what do you know about Grumley, Mrs. Marks?" inquired Mobbs, unable to restrain his impatience.

"I will tell you all in good time," returned the Gallows' Widow, now speaking without excitement and deliberately taking a chair at the table. "During the whole of your conversation, Mr. Mobbs, with Poll Price, I've been on the other side of that door; and therefore I have not lost a

word of it. The fashionable miliner to whom you alluded is Mrs. Brace of Pall Mall."

"Ah! you're indeed upon the scent, that's plain enough," cried Mobbs. "Go on."

"On the same night when Grumley called upon Mrs. Brace I paid her a visit also," proceeded the Gallows' Widow; "and I saw her and Grumley together."

"Is that possible, Lizzy?" exclaimed Carrotty Poll. "Why, you did not tell me anything about it."

"I have only seen you twice since then," said the Gallows' Widow; "last Wednesday and to-night, and on neither occasion had we much time to chatter upon indifferent things."

"But didn't Grumley arrest you?" demanded Mobbs.

"To be sure he did," answered Elizabeth Marks; "and Mrs. Brace made a compromise with him to get me off. In a word, Grumley imposed his own conditions, and she consented."

"What was the conditions?" inquired Mobbs.

"Fifty guineas in cash and a share of Mrs. Brace's bed for the night," was the startling response.

"By jingo!" ejaculated Mobbs, a sudden reminiscence striking him. "I now recollect that when I called upon the milliner she seemed very much excited and confused, and I fancied she had been drinking."

"But did you observe of what nature was the confusion she exhibited?" inquired the Gallows' Widow, her manner suddenly becoming profoundly mysterious. "Because there is an embarrassment arising from shame, and another from guilt. A man of your profession, Mr. Mobbs, ought to know the difference."

"Well, now, you've excited strange ideas in my head," observed Mobbs, in a reflective tone; "and I do remember that Mrs. Brace's manner was uncommonly suspicious. And the more I think of it, the more it reminds me of the way in which a woman looked and spoke when I went to take her up on suspicion of murdering her husband some years ago,"

"Ah! then Mrs. Brace looked and spoke like a murderess, did she?" said the Gallows' Widow, her usually tranquil voice now expressing a fiendish malignity.

"You know more than you choose to admit, Mrs. Marks,"

exclaimed Mobbs. "But, by jingo! if such a thing has really taken place —"

"What thing?" demanded the Gallows' Widow.

"Why, that Grumley has been murdered," replied Mobbs; "and now I have put into the shape of language the suspicion which you have excited in my mind."

"And you have fully caught the meaning which I intended to convey," said the Gallows' Widow. "For how stands the matter? The last trace which we at present possess of Peter Grumley leaves him at midnight in Mrs. Brace's house. He has never been seen or heard of afterward. It is quite clear that he did not intend to make himself scarce at that time; because if he had entertained such a notion he would not have arrested me. But that he had been making love to Mrs. Brace before I called was clear enough from what he said when he imposed upon her the conditions of that compromise in virtue of which I was suffered to depart scot free; and from all I observed, it was equally clear that she viewed with horror and loathing the prospect of submitting to the embraces of such a man. You must also reflect that she had that same night paid this very man five hundred and fifty guineas; and now what aspect does the whole affair assume?"

"Why, that the milliner had every inducement possible to make away with Grumley," answered Mobbs; "not only to get back her money, but likewise to rid herself of the necessity of admitting him to her bed."

"Such is my idea," exclaimed the Gallows' Widow, with the excitement of a malignant triumph. Then, between her teeth, she muttered, "Now, Mrs. Brace, I will be avenged upon you for the contempt and scorn with which you treated me the other night."

And in the little parlour behind the bar of the Beggar's Staff did Mobbs remain until a late hour in consultation with the Gallows' Widow and Carrotty Poll.

CHAPTER XXXVII

RAO AT EARL MONTGOMERY'S MANSION

It was nine o'clock in the evening as Rao, Lord Florimel's black page, rang the servant's bell of a handsome house in Grafton Street. A liveried lackey soon responded to the summons, and the sable youth was forthwith conducted into the presence of Lord Montgomery.

This nobleman was seated in a handsomely furnished parlour with a bay-window, and an open door afforded a view of a smaller room adjoining. Both apartments contained some very fine paintings set in magnificent frames. The subjects were chiefly landscapes; and amongst them there was one representing a charming piece of true English scenery, a picturesque village with its ivy-covered church tower.

Lord Montgomery was reading a book while he sipped his claret, when the black menial was shown into his presence. Laying aside the volume, and stretching out his legs before the fire with an air of indifference, his lordship said, "Well, my boy, you have something to tell me, have you not?"

"Oh, if the object of my presence here be so very trivial and unimportant," exclaimed Rao, in a tone expressive of a dignity cruelly mortified, "I may as well depart at once. Good evening, my lord," and the page glided toward the door.

"Stop, you wayward boy," cried Montgomery. "By Heaven! you are prompt to take offence."

"Yes, even as I am ready to render a service," rejoined the lad, with a marked significancy; and, turning around, he again approached the nobleman.

"Singular being!" ejaculated the latter; "are you more or less than you seem? Surely you were not bred and born

to be the lackey of an Englishman? There is a grace in your movements, an elegance in your attitudes, a perfect accuracy in your speech, a gentility in your manners — ”

“ Enough of flattery, my lord,” exclaimed Rao, sharply. “ Who and what I am matters not to you; and if you suspect that I am not what I appear, you will keep your own counsel in that respect, because I am prepared to render you a service of a nature which will lay you under no small obligation toward me.”

“ Sit down, Rao, sit down,” said Lord Montgomery, well convinced that the boy was indeed something more than he appeared and that the lackey’s livery suited not well his real condition, however elegantly it might become his slight and graceful figure. “ Now will you take a glass of wine? ”

“ I thank your lordship,” responded the page, “ but my favourite beverage is water. And now you will permit me at once to open the discourse upon the topic which it is destined to take, inasmuch as I dare not remain too long absent from Piccadilly.”

“ Proceed,” said Lord Montgomery, the first feeling of prejudice and dislike which he had entertained toward the page having already changed into one of sympathy and interest.

“ Your lordship intends to be present at the masquerade which is to take place at Covent Garden to-morrow night? ” said Rao, fixing his dark eyes with a peculiar keenness upon the nobleman’s countenance.

“ Yes, such is my intention,” was the reply.

“ And your lordship would fain personate my master, Lord Florimel? ” continued Rao, in the same precise tone and positive manner which seemed to show that he was describing those thoughts which he had fathomed, and was not hazarding interrogative conjectures.

“ Well, I am not audacious enough to deny the truth of your surmise,” said Lord Montgomery.

“ Surmise! ” echoed the boy, in a contemptuous tone. “ Think you, my lord, that I cannot read your hidden soul as plainly as the printed page of a book? Yes, I have penetrated all your thoughts and wishes in respect to that masquerade; ay, and I have read all the hopes which the nar-

rative of Lord Florimel's romantic adventure has excited within you."

"Then you played the eavesdropper, Rao, when your master was telling me that strange story?" exclaimed Earl Montgomery.

"Yes, I have read all your secret wishes and all your fervent hopes, my lord," resumed the boy, without heeding the remark which the nobleman had just made, and which proclaimed an accusation that he would doubtless have denied if he could.

At this instant the door was opened, and a servant entered the room. Rao started to his feet, evidently to save Lord Montgomery from any suspicion or misconstruction that might arise from the fact of his being found familiarly seated with a liveried page; and the nobleman threw at the boy a rapid glance expressive of his thanks for this proof of good taste on his part.

"Please your lordship," said the domestic who had just entered the room, "Mr. Rigden requests an immediate interview. He has only one word to say, and will not detain your lordship a minute."

"Show him in," returned Montgomery. Then, observing the page, whose presence he had at the instant forgotten, he said, "Step into the adjacent room, my boy, while I say a few words to my solicitor. It is not worth the trouble to make you step out into the hall for the short period that we shall be engaged together."

This proceeding on the earl's part was another phase of that tacit respect with which he was inspired toward Rao by the belief that he was something more than he seemed, — an idea that forbade the nobleman from treating the boy as a mere lackey. And Rao understood the considerate feeling which was thus manifested toward him: for even as he glided into the adjoining room, he looked back to express his grateful appreciation thereof with a rapid, fervent glance.

The sable page closed the door behind him; and at the same moment Mr. Rigden was ushered into the presence of Lord Montgomery.

The attorney was a middle-aged man, with a pale face and keen gray eyes. He was dressed in black, wore a white cravat and ample shirt-frill, and was altogether very precise in his personal appearance. He took snuff, but he managed

the habit in so cleanly a manner that his linen never betrayed it even by a single grain of the pulverized weed. His bearing was naturally cold, reserved, and distant; he never spoke hastily, and scarcely ever betrayed an emotion, much less a feeling of excitement. In fine, he was one of those shrewd, cautious, and even mistrustful men who never take a step without looking well where they are about to tread and never give utterance to a word without having deliberately weighed it in all its probable or possible bearings.

"Well, Rigden," said Lord Montgomery, rising to proffer his hand to the lawyer, while the domestic who had introduced him retired immediately from the apartment, "what news? Has anything unpleasant happened?"

"Nothing unpleasant," answered the attorney, abandoning the tips of two fingers to the nobleman's grasp, for he himself hated shaking hands and all similar proofs of friendship or social amenity. "Just as I was leaving my office this evening I received a certain notice from the court; and I thought that as I was compelled to visit your neighbourhood at about nine, I would call and communicate the circumstances to your lordship."

"And what is the notice about?" demanded Montgomery, literally trembling with feverish impatience.

"The notice, my lord," said Mr. Rigden, taking out his gold snuff-box and deliberately indulging in a pinch of its contents, "is from the Court of Chancery, and is to the effect that the Master's final report will be delivered in on Saturday next in the several matters of '*Montgomery versus Bellenden*,' '*Raymond Montgomery versus Bellenden*,' and '*Aylmer versus Bellenden*.'"

"On Saturday next?" repeated the nobleman, with the air of one who trembled at the close proximity of an event to which he had nevertheless been looking forward with so much anxiety.

"Yes, on Saturday next," said Mr. Rigden.

"Then all the fresh evidence has been put in?" continued Montgomery, in a tone of anxious inquiry; "all the important and very remarkable testimony which I have procured from the country within the last few weeks?"

"It is all before the Master, my lord," replied Mr. Rigden.

"Come now, do throw off this hyperborean chill, this more

than professional reserve," exclaimed Lord Montgomery, "and tell me candidly and as a friend whether you feel convinced that the decrees will be in our favour."

"Nothing, my lord, is certain in this world," responded the attorney, taking another pinch of snuff, and leaning forward in such a manner that not a grain should alight upon his snowy shirt-frill; "and of all uncertain things the results of Chancery suits are the most incalculable," he added.

"But the evidence I procured the other day," insisted Lord Montgomery, "must prove overwhelming."

"It will have its weight, my lord," said the attorney. "By the bye, your brother, Lord Raymond Montgomery, should be in London in the course of the week, as his presence is indispensable. You remember how singular is that clause of your ancestor's will under which he claims the Warwickshire estates."

"Indeed, I can scarcely have forgotten a single syllable of a testamentary provision so vitally important to our family interests," observed Lord Montgomery. "But I will write to my brother to-morrow," he added, hastily, "and I will urge him to come up to town without delay. I have not heard from him, nor indeed of him, for some weeks past."

"His melancholy disposition leads him to seek the retirement of a rural existence," observed the attorney. "But does his lordship still feel as much as ever that disappointment which his heart's affections experienced? And, by the bye, when I think of it, the marriage of Miss Aylmer to Mr. Clarendon, now Lord Holderness, must have been a sad blow to your unhappy brother, inasmuch as it destroyed the last hope which he could possibly have cherished —"

"Yes, he no doubt loved Fernanda very dearly," observed Lord Montgomery, with a certain hastiness, amounting almost to a pettishness of manner, as if he either disliked the subject, or thought it irrelevant at that moment. "I suppose that now the Master's report is ready, judgment will be delivered very shortly?"

"We have every reason to hope so, my lord," returned Mr. Rigidon. "But in case your lordship should forget to write to Lord Raymond to-morrow, I will myself communi-

cate with him. I presume a letter will reach him at Malden Farm? ”

“ He was there when I heard of him last,” responded Earl Montgomery. “ You had better write to him yourself; it will be more regular.”

“ I shall assuredly do so,” said the attorney, taking another pinch of snuff. “ And now, before I leave your lordship,” he continued, a thought striking him, “ I should wish to ask a certain question respecting a noble acquaintance of yours — and yet I scarcely know how to take such a liberty — ”

“ Do not hesitate, Mr. Rigden,” exclaimed Lord Montgomery. “ If I can serve you in any manner, I shall be delighted. To whom of my noble acquaintances do you allude? ”

“ To Lord Florimel,” answered the attorney. “ But lest the question which I am desirous to ask your lordship should appear impertinent, I will explain in a few words my motives in putting it. The fact is, that this very morning a noble client of mine introduced to me a young man who has suddenly and strangely discovered certain grounds and reasons for supposing that he has claims of an extraordinary nature which would materially affect the fortune and the social position of Lord Florimel; and I must frankly confess that as far as I was enabled to look into the matter at the moment it was presented to me, the young man’s claims appear to be well worth a lawsuit. At the same time, I have no doubt that he would listen to any reasonable terms for an amicable settlement without the intervention of the tribunals; and to this course I should recommend him to accede. The question, therefore, that I was desirous to ask your lordship, is whether Lord Florimel is a man likely to treat the affair in a friendly way if it be submitted to him in the same spirit, or whether he is one of those obstinate individuals, who, believing that possession is worth nine points of the law, will plunge headlong into Chancery with a neck or nothing determination.”

“ I should say that Lord Florimel will listen to reason,” answered Montgomery. “ But I am sorry to hear that he is menaced in so serious a manner, and I am pretty sure that he suspects nothing of the kind; for I was with him this morning for a couple of hours, and we were conversing

in a most familiar strain upon many topics of a private nature."

"No, he at present entertains not the slightest idea of the storm which is brewing," observed Rigden; "and I must beg your lordship, as a particular favour, not to mention a word upon the subject until he shall first broach it to you. For it was in a pure friendly spirit that I put such a question to you just now; and I repeat, that my advice will be to the effect of a private compromise instead of an appeal to the law courts."

"Would it be indiscreet to ask who is the claimant and what is the nature of his claims against Lord Florimel?" said Montgomery. "I pledge you my honour that not a syllable of anything you may communicate shall pass my lips."

"My lord, I cannot mention the name of the claimant," said the lawyer, "because the matter is as yet entirely in its infancy. But this much I have no objection to state, that the claims advanced are of the most sweeping and extensive nature, not only striking at the possessions of Lord Florimel, but even at his very right to the peerage itself."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Montgomery, "you astonish me. And yet it was but this very morning that Lord Florimel happened to mention to me, in the course of conversation, that he was in possession of all the deeds and documents regarding his estates."

"Ah! he told your lordship that, did he?" said Mr. Rigden, taking a pinch of snuff. "Then all I can now add is that the piece of information you have just given me has quite set at rest one portion of the matter of which I have been speaking; for the claims of the young man to the Florimel estates are founded upon a belief that no regular deeds conferring a title upon the present holder are in existence."

"Then I am glad you have mentioned the affair to me, my dear Rigden," exclaimed Montgomery; "for I can assure you that Florimel not only possesses his deeds and parchments, but has even told me where he keeps them."

"In that case, as I said before, one part of the business is set at rest," observed the lawyer. "The only claim now remaining regards the peerage, and that point cannot be

worth disputing, inasmuch as a mere empty title would be a burden instead of an honour to a penniless man. So, after all, I think that Lord Florimel is quite safe, and I return your lordship many thanks for the information you have given me. Good evening, my lord."

"Will you not step up-stairs to the drawing-room and inform my mother of the notice you have received from the Chancery Court?" inquired Montgomery. "The countess is all alone this evening."

"I will do myself the honour of waiting upon her," said Rigden; and, with a ceremonious bow, he quitted the apartment.

At the same moment that the door closed behind him, the remembrance that the black page was in the adjoining room flashed to the brain of Lord Montgomery, who had altogether forgotten the circumstance during the interview with the lawyer.

"Perdition!" muttered the nobleman to himself, as he recollected the eavesdropping propensities of the sable page; but he was almost instantaneously reassured by the thought that nothing had passed with the lawyer touching his own family affairs that he could care about the boy overhearing, while all that had been said respecting Lord Florimel was of very inferior importance.

Throwing open the door of communication between the two apartments, the nobleman was about to call Rao by name, when he caught sight of the boy reclining in a large armchair and apparently wrapped in the profoundest repose. Montgomery advanced into the inner room, where a light was also burning as well as in the other, and the door, escaping from his hand, closed with some degree of violence. Rao started up, rubbed his eyes, and in a few moments seemed to recollect where he was.

"I humbly beg your lordship's pardon," he said, "for having so far forgotten myself as to fall asleep. But is it late?" he demanded, with a sudden anxiety.

"A quarter to ten," answered Montgomery, referring to his watch. "That cursed lawyer came for a minute and stayed half an hour."

"And I will not detain your lordship one-tenth of that time," said Rao. "To sum up, therefore, all I have said or was about to say, I will at once observe that as your lord-

ship intends to go to the masquerade to-morrow night, you will do well to accept the loan of a domino which I will leave with your lordship's valet in the course of the day."

"Ah! I understand you full well, Rao," exclaimed the earl. "Your master's commands have been disobeyed, and you have not destroyed the blue domino."

The black page smiled with an arch significancy, but made no reply.

"And yet," observed Montgomery, "I cannot conceive wherefore you should have shown so much anxiety not only to fathom my desires, but also to gratify them."

"Simply because I am fond of amusing myself in a particular manner," said Rao; "and the sort of amusement which I like is what you English people call mischief."

"Yes, I have heard that East Indians are apt to be as mischievous as monkeys," observed the nobleman, laughing, "and now I have received a proof of it. Well, my good boy, I accept your offer, and I will wear the domino. But of course this is a secret between you and me."

"I am not likely to reveal it," said Rao, laconically.

"And I pledge you my word that I will not," returned the nobleman. Then, after a few moments' hesitation, he said, "But tell me how I can reward you for this service which you are rendering me, for I scarcely know by what means to testify my sense of your kindness."

"I require nothing at present, my lord," answered Rao. "Should I ever need a boon at your hands, I shall come and ask it."

"And most cheerfully shall I grant your request, if it be in my power to do so," said the earl.

The black page bowed a slight, but graceful acknowledgment of the pledge thus given, and then took his departure, gliding away from the nobleman's presence like a shadow.

"There is something incomprehensibly mysterious about that boy," said Lord Montgomery to himself, as he returned to his seat in the front room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MASQUERADE — SCENE THE FIRST

FAITHFUL to his promise, the black page delivered the braided domino at Lord Montgomery's house, in Grafton Street, on the morning following the incidents just related; and about ten o'clock in the evening, the nobleman alighted from a plain carriage at the entrance to Covent Garden Theatre.

He was enveloped in the domino, the hood of which was drawn almost entirely over his head; and in addition to this precaution, he wore a mask. It was thus impossible to obtain the slightest glimpse of his countenance, while through the holes of the mask his eyes commanded a perfect view of the brilliant scene into the midst of which he now entered.

The only circumstance which made him fear that the trick would prove a failure, and that he could not succeed in passing himself off as Lord Florimel, was the difference in their stature; for although Montgomery was only of the middle height, yet Florimel was shorter still, and there was a probability that the keen observation of a woman would notice this fact. However, Montgomery regarded the adventure as one well worth the trial; and he had already made up his mind to play his part with the utmost caution, tact, and circumspection, in case he should really be accosted by some disguised beauty.

The interior of Covent Garden Theatre presented a scene of the most dazzling brilliancy. The pit was completely boarded over, so that a floor was formed to meet the stage; and at the end of the stage itself a full band was placed, under the direction of a celebrated leader. The arena was crowded with masques, displaying every variety of costume, every singularity of fancy dress, and every artifice to ensure

complete disguise; and the boxes were thronged with occupants, some in masquerade attire, and others in ball-dresses. The magnificent crystal chandeliers suspended to the ceiling and the candelabra projecting from around the tiers of boxes flooded the vast interior of the building with an also overpowering lustre, so that everything was penetrated, as it were, with light, and the countless beings gathered there moved about like butterflies and gorgeous insects in the noonday sun.

The music was playing, and the body of harmony, with its variations of sweetness and grandeur, pathos and excitement, seemed to fill every part of the theatre. The atmosphere was warm and perfumed, the murmuring of soft voices formed an undercurrent of sound dominated by the superior swell of the superb music, and the eye of the beholder wandered with ineffable delight over the fairy scene.

Lord Montgomery walked slowly around the arena, keeping close to the lowest tier of boxes, in order that he might command a view of all the disguised forms, male or female, that were moving about upon that elastic floor. Then he mingled in the crowd itself, exchanging jests with some and provoking witty repartees from others, but still without attracting the special notice of any particular lady.

At length, retiring from the thickest of the crowd and posting himself near the musicians, he began to scrutinize in detail all the female masques who seemed to be invested with any degree of interest.

But scarcely had he stationed himself in that spot which appeared so convenient for his survey, when an elegant female, dressed as a flower-girl, passed rapidly by him; and from behind the black satin mask which covered her countenance she darted upon him a look that seemed intended to pierce through his disguise, impenetrable though it really were.

Montgomery followed her with his eyes as she plunged into the midst of the crowd; and he saw enough of her to excite the liveliest interest in his soul. She was tall in stature, and her exquisitely modelled form appeared to be almost visible through the picturesque attire which she wore, so admirably was it fitted to her shape and so well did it develop the fluent and rounded proportions of those very contours which it concealed. The short petticoats dis-

played the sculptured delicacy of the feet and ankles and the robust swell of the legs; and on one of the white and beautifully moulded arms, which were bare, hung a basket of artificial flowers. Her hair was of a rich dark brown; and as much of the neck, throat, and bosom as met the eye of the beholder was of a dazzling whiteness. Nothing, in fine, could exceed the purity of that polished skin; nothing could be more charming than that snowy complexion which belonged to flesh evidently plump and warm with the vigorous health of youth.

Montgomery was so struck by her appearance and so ravished by the graces of her person, that he would have staked his soul upon the belief that her countenance was of a corresponding beauty. So lost in rapture was he that he seemed transfixed to the spot; and when he thought of following her, it was too late; she had disappeared amidst the thickest of the multitude of masques. But it instantaneously struck him that this must be the lady who had sent the domino and who expected to meet Lord Florimel beneath that disguise; and then, recollecting how keen was the glance which she threw upon him and how precipitate was the immediate retreat, he said to himself, "The adventure is a failure. She saw that mine was not the stature of Lord Florimel, and she has departed in mingled rage and disappointment."

But scarcely had he made this reflection, when he was startled with a thrill of ecstatic feeling that passed like an electric shock through his entire frame, on beholding the graceful Flower Girl once more issue from the crowd and approach the spot where he was standing. Her pace was now slow and her step somewhat hesitating; and even from behind that mask which formed so impervious a veil to conceal any confusion which she might have experienced, did she evidently send forth agitated glances. But the soft and graceful balancing of her gait, the floating elegance of her form, and the seductive charm of all her movements riveted the attention of Lord Montgomery; and he thought within himself that if this lady should indeed prove the heroine of the present adventure, no effort that he could possibly make to possess her ought to be spared. For to his memory rushed all the glowing descriptions which Florimel had given him of that night of mystery, love, and voluptuousness, — those

four hours of frenzied bliss, thrilling ecstasies, and burning kisses; and Montgomery said to himself, "My God! if this be the woman whose amorous proficiency plunged Florimel into a never-to-be-forgotten paradise, I would sooner lose my own soul to Satan than the chance of enjoying the mingled intoxication and delirium of her warm embraces and furious caresses."

And while these reflections swept through the brain of Earl Montgomery, the Flower Girl — for so must we denominate the charming unknown — was still advancing toward him; while he remained motionless as a statue, but devouring her with the ardent looks which he threw upon her from behind his mask. For as yet he could not be sure that she was purposely accosting him, nor was it an unmistakable certainty that he was indeed an object of attention or interest on her part. She might be moving in that direction in the abstraction of her thoughts, or she might believe him to be some one for whom she was looking, and yet not have in view the aims which he hoped and suspected.

While he was making these additional reflections, she approached within three yards of the spot where he was standing; then she passed him by at a pace so slow as to convince him that she was only seeking the leisure and the opportunity to contemplate him with attention, for her eyes, shining like twin diamonds through the mask, remained fixed upon him the whole time.

"Yes, she is the lady of this adventure," thought Montgomery within himself. "She recognizes the domino, but she hesitates because I am taller than Florimel. Would that I were of a stature as feminine as his!"

The Flower Girl passed by the nobleman and advanced as far as the music-stands at the extremity of the stage; then turning abruptly around, she again approached him, slackening her pace as she drew nearer toward the spot where he still stood motionless. It struck him that he would speak to her; but he was afraid that he could not sufficiently imitate Florimel's voice in order to deceive her, and he saw the monstrous imprudence of doing anything to strengthen the suspicion with which she already appeared to view him.

Again she passed him by, closer this time than before; and he could even catch the bright and searching looks which she fixed upon him. Yes, and he heard, too, the subdued

sigh which came from her bosom, and which seemed to torture her with a suffocating effect.

The impulse which now seized upon him was irresistible; and stepping forward, he took her hand, saying, in a low whisper, "Beauteous lady, wherefore are you unhappy?"

For an instant he felt her hand tremble even through the white kid glove which covered it. The next moment that hand was snatched back with a strange abruptness, and her looks appeared to flash through her mask, as she said, in a tone that was musically fluid though evidently feigned, "Who are you?"

"I am Lord Florimel to the world, Gabriel to you, sweet lady, whoever you may be," was the response delivered by Montgomery, in a key so soft and low that it was impossible it could either confirm or lull a suspicion as to whose voice it really was.

"You are Lord Florimel?" said the Flower Girl, her own voice now sounding so tremulously as to be scarcely audible, and the earl could perceive that her entire frame writhed as if with a sudden convulsion, but whether of frenzied joy or searching anguish he could not at the instant conjecture; for that abrupt vibration so much resembled the spasm of a bitter affliction, and yet what other feeling could influence her save a thrill of ecstasy?

"Yes, I am Lord Florimel," repeated Montgomery, still rendering his voice utterly impossible to be recognized; "and you, dearest lady —"

"Traitor! perjurer!" murmured the unknown, in a dying voice, and she appeared suddenly to stagger as if about to fall.

Montgomery, though struck with dismay at the tremendous epithets which had just been hurled at his head, stretched out his arms to save her; but this movement on his part seemed to recall her to herself in an instant, and, repelling his attentions with an evident mingling of hatred and scorn, she darted away, glided with the aerial lightness of a bayadere amidst the crowd, and was lost to his view.

"Damnation!" murmured Lord Montgomery to himself; "the adventure is spoiled, the trick is discovered, the game is lost. She perceived that I was not Lord Florimel; and as it was Lord Florimel, and Lord Florimel only, whom she was resolved to have, no substitute would answer her purpose.

But what on earth did she mean by calling me a perjurer? The word 'traitor' is intelligible enough, for it is doubtless a treacherous act to personate one's friend in a love-intrigue of so delicate a nature as this. But perjurer — perjurer — how can I be a perjurer? Perhaps she meant that I was the traitor and Florimel the perjurer; and yet he assured me that she never bound him by any oath or pledge at all. Be that, however, as it will, it is not the less annoying to experience so signal a failure in an enterprise which promised to be of so delicious a piquancy. She must assuredly be a splendid creature! What a glorious complexion, what admirably moulded arms, what a superb length of limb, and what an elegant figure! Then the bust, just ample enough to be voluptuous, and yet appearing to possess a virginal plumpness and firmness. Albeit she is no virgin, if Florimel's tale be true; and who can doubt it? Still there is about this charming being a certain maiden freshness and all that wholesome flush of youthfulness which do not bespeak a long nor an intimate acquaintance with amorous pursuits and exciting pleasures. Oh, it is enough to drive me mad with rage and disappointment, to think that I should have lost so golden an opportunity. But I may yet make my peace with her. It is not perhaps too late, and who knows what may be the result? I will plead the strength of a passion excited almost to delirium by the tale which Lord Florimel narrated; and I will reveal the whole truth, who I am, and by what stratagem I hoped to take the place of the young noble whose puritanical devotion to his Pauline would not permit him to plunge into this intrigue. Yes, let me seek the mysterious Flower Girl, and all will yet be well."

With this last reflection still traversing his brain, Lord Montgomery hastened in search of the disguised lady who had already excited so deep an interest in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE MASQUERADE — SCENE THE SECOND

WE must now inform the reader of a circumstance which we did not choose to interrupt our narrative to relate before. This was, that while the Flower Girl was timidly hovering about the spot where Lord Montgomery had been posted, in the manner already related, her movements were observed and keenly, though cautiously, watched by two individuals in masquerade costume.

One was a tall and somewhat portly man, of fine proportions and robust symmetry. He was attired in a Turkish garb remarkable for the richness of its material and the elegance of its ornaments; and his countenance was carefully concealed by a black satin mask.

His companion, who was of shorter stature, was dressed in a black domino, and likewise wore a mask.

These two persons had entered the theatre almost at the same time as the Flower Girl; and as the Turk was immediately struck by the winning grace and seductive elegance of her appearance, concealed though her features were, he had followed her amidst the mazes of the crowd, though at such a distance as to avoid exciting her suspicions. His companion in the black domino kept constantly a few paces in the rear; and whenever the Turk addressed a word to him, he received the communication with the profound deference of an inferior.

From the first moment, we say, that they had caught sight of the Flower Girl, they had watched her motions, in order to ascertain whether she was altogether alone, or whether she had an appointment with some one for whom she was searching. They had seen her approach Lord Montgomery in the first instance, they had observed the

scrutinizing look which she threw upon him, and they had marked the rapidity with which she turned back and plunged again into the crowd. Then they followed her at a distance, and they perceived that she was evidently hastening away from the brilliant scene, probably with a view of quitting it altogether; and the Turk was already pressing forward to introduce himself to her notice, when she suddenly stopped short, as if some new idea had struck her, and the next moment she was retracing her way through the busy throng of masques, toward the spot where the Blue Domino (Lord Montgomery) was still standing.

The Turk and the Black Domino likewise altered their course, still bending their steps in the track of that being whose form possessed so many captivating graces as to impress upon the mind the conviction that her face must be of a corresponding loveliness.

But this time she approached the Blue Domino with a slower and more timid step, and while she was thus accosting Montgomery in the manner and with the result already described, the Turk and the Black Domino were intently observing her proceedings from the opposite side of the stage.

"By the living God, Germain," said the Turk, suddenly clutching his companion by the arm, "I never was so enchanted by the elegance, the symmetry, and the grace of a woman's form as I am at this moment. Such a creature must possess the countenance of a divinity."

"Her complexion is certainly charming, your Royal Highness," was the response given by the Black Domino.

"Her complexion!" ejaculated the Prince of Wales, who was disguised in Turkish garb. "Is that all you notice with regard to her? Look at her figure; it is as finely proportioned as that of poor Octavia Clarendon. Then her foot and ankle, and the symmetry of her leg — Oh, Germain, I must and will possess her, and 'tis for you to manage the affair for me in some way or another."

"Your Royal Highness may rest assured that if it be possible," said Germain, "this matter shall terminate according to your wishes."

"But what extraordinary coquetry is this which she is practising toward that Blue Domino?" exclaimed the prince, aside to his faithful dependent. "Look how timidly

and bashfully she hovers around him, while he does not move an inch. Surely it is some statue that is perched up there, and not a being of warm flesh and blood; else never would he remain thus apathetic while so heavenly a creature is endeavouring to win his attention."

"Your Royal Highness will pardon me," said Germain, "but he is evidently contemplating her through his mask with an absorbing interest. My opinion is that each one has got a particular appointment, and that neither is convinced that the other is the person expected."

"Yes, it must be something of that sort, Germain," observed the prince; "and the misunderstanding or uncertainty becomes every instant more embarrassing. The Blue Domino remains stationary, the Flower Girl advances timidly, and now she passes him by, and they do not speak. But this is extraordinary, Germain, and I have a very great mind to accost the fair one and propose myself as her companion."

"Your Royal Highness may spoil all by so precipitate a course," said Germain. "Let us see the result of this curious dumb-show and byplay, and be led by circumstances."

"And if the unknown charmer should find her expected beau either in that Blue Domino or in some similar masque?" said the prince.

"Then it will be difficult to bring matters to the issue desired by your Royal Highness," returned Germain. "But an idea has just struck me, may it please —"

"Well, what is this idea?" demanded the prince.

"That there is no appointment at all on the part of this lady," answered the valet; "but that she is a jealous wife or mistress, on the lookout for a faithless husband or a perfidious lover."

"Egad! the idea is not a bad one, Germain," exclaimed his Royal Highness. "But what is she doing now? She advances as far as the musicians, she turns abruptly, she retraces her way, ah! and now they speak."

"And there is evidently nothing cordial between them, your Royal Highness," observed Germain.

"Upon my word, I am not sure," said the prince; "he takes her hand —"

"And now she repulses him," added Germain. "Ah!

the interview is over; there is some disagreeable discovery — ”

“ Or else some very embarrassing mistake,” observed the prince. “ But away she goes. We must follow her, and if she should leave the theatre and take a hackney-coach or a cab, Germain — ”

“ I understand what to do, your Royal Highness,” said the astute valet, as he followed his master in pursuit of the Flower Girl.

But here we must take leave of the Prince of Wales and Germain for the present, and return to Lord Montgomery, whom we likewise left hastening after that same mysterious lady.

Cursing his folly for having allowed a single moment to elapse ere he sped in chase of the enchanting creature, he was actually forcing his way through the crowd of masques, when a gentle hand caught him by one of the folds of his domino, and a voice of musical softness said, in a tone of timid inquiry, “ Lord Florimel? ”

Montgomery stopped instantaneously, but gave no immediate answer. For this circumstance threw him, all in a moment, into an unspeakable bewilderment; inasmuch as the masque who had thus accosted him was a lady of fine figure, and habited as a Circassian Slave.

Were there, then, two heroines in the present adventure? Were two fair ones in the secret of the overture made to Lord Florimel by means of the masquerade-ticket and the blue domino? Or was there some grand mistake somewhere; and if so, which was the legitimate and real heroine, the Flower Girl or the Circassian Slave?

Swift as the shadow of a flight of birds passes over a field when the sun is shining brightly did these thoughts traverse the brain of Earl Montgomery; and with the same rapidity did his eyes sweep the form of the lady who had accosted him.

And what was the result of this survey? He observed that she was quite as tall as the Flower Girl and somewhat stouter; indeed, that she possessed the embonpoint of a woman of riper age, and whose charms have acquired the luxuriant voluptuousness of maturity in place of the first freshness of youth. He noticed, therefore, that her bosom was of large proportions, but still preserving a firmness

unmarred by its fulness; and that, at all events, it was of the purest virginal whiteness. Her shoulders were well filled out, slightly rounded, and beautifully sloping; and her waist was of a symmetry properly consistent with the amplitude of this magnificent bust and the large projection of the hips. Her arms were of sculptural massiveness, but admirably moulded, round, plump, and of dazzling whiteness; and her hands were perfectly ravishing with their long taper fingers and their pellucid almond-shaped nails. Her feet and ankles were of corresponding beauty; and altogether her form, from the throat to the sole of the foot, was of a splendour and a voluptuousness which denoted a woman grandly handsome and fervently impassioned. For who could doubt that the black silk mask concealed a face whose features were in perfect keeping with the richness of contour, the fineness of proportion, and the elegance of figure which we have endeavoured to describe?

Lord Montgomery's eyes, in sweeping over the lady's person, embraced at a glance all that we have taken some minutes to delineate.

"Yes, I am Lord Florimel," he said, at length, and with a voice as effectually disguised as when he exchanged those brief and rapid observations with the Flower Girl. "And are you, lady, that same adorable but mysterious creature who fifteen months ago —"

"Hush, my lord, hush!" murmured the Circassian Slave, although Montgomery was speaking only in a whisper. "You remember the promise which I then made you —"

"Yes, that we should meet again, dear lady," continued the earl; "but an age has elapsed since then, and I began to fear that the pledge on your part would be never kept."

"Then you have wished to meet me again, Gabriel?" said the lady, in a voice trembling with ineffable emotions; and she walked slowly aside with Earl Montgomery as she thus spoke.

"Oh, how can you ask me, adorable creature?" exclaimed the nobleman, who remembered, as his looks now dwelt devouringly upon her superb form, all that Florimel had told him of the impassioned ardour and frenetic desires which animated the heroine of his four hours' enjoyment; and the earl felt his own imagination already wandering amidst those Elysian blisses which had been so faithfully

described to him, and of which the mysterious being now by his side was at the time alike the creatress and the partaker.

"I ask you whether you wished to meet me again, Gabriel," said the lady, in reply to his own ejaculatory observation, "because it is sweet to receive such an assurance, and because I must learn, ere we proceed further in the renewal of our amour, whether you are prepared to be as docile, submissive, and obedient to all I shall suggest or require as you were upon the former occasion?"

"Dearest lady, do you imagine that by word or deed on my part I would forfeit the bliss which is derived from your society?" asked Lord Montgomery, still speaking in a low and assumed tone; and it struck him that through the holes in the lady's mask came burning looks vibrating with desire.

Then, as from behind his own mask, he fixed his eyes more ardently than before upon the splendid form of the Circassian Slave, his devouring looks sought to penetrate through her very garments and feast, as it were, upon the charms of her entire person, so that in imagination did he finish and complete all the flowing lines which traced the contours of her shape, and all the inflections and swelling reliefs of her luxuriant figure, until her apparel grew diaphanous, and her whole form became visible through the transparent vesture. Then, still giving the rein to his wanton fancy, he felt as if he were already folding in his embrace that fine person and revelling in all the sensuous enjoyment of its charms; and, maddened by the desires which were consuming him, he seized her hand, murmuring in that tone of half-suffocation which is caused by extreme emotion, whether of bliss or pain, "Lady, dear lady, let us depart to thine abode of love and mystery and pleasure."

"Yes, we will hasten away from this scene which has no longer any attractions for me, since I have encountered you, my Gabriel," returned the Circassian Slave, her voice trembling with a profound sigh of pleasure.

At that moment Lord Montgomery perceived the Flower Girl standing at a little distance and evidently surveying himself and his companion with the most absorbing attention; and suspecting that her views were far from friendly if not downright mischievous, — though who she was or what her aims might be he could not, for the life of him,

conjecture, — he hastened to lead the Circassian Slave away from the busy, brilliant scene.

"Do you know that female masque who seemed to be watching us?" inquired the lady, in a voice suddenly denoting a profound agitation, as she quickened her pace.

"Who, the Flower Girl?" said Lord Montgomery, now absolutely hurrying the Circassian Slave along toward the nearest avenue of egress. "No, I do not think that she was paying any attention to us —"

"But I am certain she was," interrupted the lady, with a strong emphasis. "Ah! Florimel, 'tis some fair one who loves you, who knows that you were coming hither disguised, and who surveys me with all the rage of jealousy. Heavens, if there should be a scene, a disturbance!"

And Lord Montgomery not only felt his unknown companion's hand trembling nervously, but also observed her entire frame vibrating and quivering with alarm.

"Fear nothing, lady; we are neither watched nor followed," he said, in a tone of joyous reassurance, after having cast a rapid glance behind.

"Oh, what a weight is lifted from my soul," murmured the Circassian Slave, likewise looking hastily back and perceiving that the Flower Girl was now in earnest conversation with a female masque representing a Gipsy. "But I feel as if I should faint, Gabriel. The terror I have experienced has been cruel, and now this sudden reaction —"

"Will you not be able to reach your carriage, dearest lady?" inquired Montgomery, in a tone which evinced his alarm, although he still had the presence of mind to disguise his voice.

"No, I fear not — a faintness is coming over me — oh, for a glass of water!" murmured the Circassian Slave, now supporting herself in such a manner that her two arms were passed as it were in his own and her bosom leaned against his shoulder.

Fortunately they at this moment emerged from the midst of the masquerade scene and entered the corridor whence opened the lower tier of boxes, so that they were now comparatively free from observation, few persons being near. The air of that place likewise felt pure and fresh after the stifling warmth of the atmosphere inside; and, leaning against the wall for a few moments, the Circassian

slave appeared to recover from the languor of faintness which the heat of the theatre and the dread of detection combined to bring upon her.

But here we must leave Lord Montgomery and his unknown companion for a short space, while we return to the Flower Girl and those who were engaged in watching her movements.

CHAPTER XL

THE MASQUERADE — SCENE THE THIRD

OUR readers will remember that, having thrown at Lord Montgomery those angry denunciations of "traitor" and "perjurer," the Flower Girl sped hastily away, with the apparent intention of quitting the theatre; while, on the other hand, the Prince of Wales and Germain hurried in pursuit of her amidst the bustling, thronging, laughing, chattering multitude of masques.

But again, as on the former occasion, a thought seemed to strike the Flower Girl, causing her first to slacken her pace, then to stop short, and lastly, to turn around and begin to retrace her way slowly toward the spot where she had left Earl Montgomery.

It was evident that she was tortured by some cruel uncertainty, or that her bosom was wrung by emotions of a very painful nature. Not a syllable did she reply to the various jests, some innocent enough, and others equivocal to a degree, which were addressed to her in her character of a Flower Girl. Negligently upon her beauteous arm hung the basket, and her breast heaved and fell with profound sighs that swelled almost into audible and suffocating sobs.

"I cannot make her out at all," observed the Prince of Wales to Germain. "She is decidedly as unhappy as she well can be."

"Your Royal Highness may rest assured," said the valet, "that jealousy is at the bottom of it all. See, her hands are ungloved. Can we not ascertain whether she be a married woman?"

"Your eyes are as sharp as mine, Germain," returned the prince. "But I will approach her. Ah! what beautiful

hands! How taper are the fingers! No, she does not wear a wedding ring."

"Then she is a kept mistress, perhaps," suggested Germain.

"I'll swear she is no such thing," exclaimed the heir apparent, almost indignant at the allegation, as if it positively reflected upon himself or in some way wounded his own feelings. "I am sufficiently experienced in womankind, or, to speak more delicately upon the subject, I am quite connoisseur enough in all that relates to the fair sex to be able to form some estimate of a female's rank, position, and social standing by her general deportment, her mien, her walk, her manner, and her apparel, ay, even though her countenance be masked and her dress be a fancy costume. Now, in the present instance, Germain," continued the prince, "I have observed about that charming creature a certain reserve and bashfulness, a shrinking from the contact of the multitudes around her, a sense of isolation and of a position unusually friendless and unprotected, all of which may be regarded as striking proofs that she is not accustomed to such scenes as this, and that she assuredly is not here for her amusement. She has not the effrontery of a kept mistress, and she is scarcely bold enough for a girl who is looking after a lover to whom she has surrendered her virtue. Besides, there is a virgin air about her, a perfume of innocence, as it were, an odour of chastity, combined with all that first freshness of youth which nothing in the shape of amorous pleasure has yet marred."

"Behold, your Royal Highness!" exclaimed Germain, suddenly catching his master by the sleeve, "a masque has accosted the Blue Domino."

"Ah! a Circassian Slave," said the prince. "And, by Jove! she is a splendid woman likewise. But I prefer my favourite, the Flower Girl. Where is she?"

"There," returned the valet. "She has posted herself in such a position that she can observe everything which passes between the Blue Domino with the singular braiding and the superb Circassian Slave."

"A decided case of love and jealousy," said the prince, his eyes dwelling with a gloating and devouring look upon the beauteous form of the Flower Girl. "But it is a pure love, and —"

"And therefore your Royal Highness will not molest the poor Flower Girl, who seems to be unhappy enough already?" said Germain, fancying that he had really fallen into the right track of the prince's thoughts upon the subject.

"You are mad, my good fellow," exclaimed the royal voluptuary. "So far from abandoning my designs with regard to that fair creature, I am more than ever resolved to push the adventure to a triumphant issue. If her lover in the blue domino be neglected and faithless, I will console her; and if he be insensible to the graces of her person, I will teach her the road to a terrestrial paradise. Besides, there will be the charm of novelty in this conquest."

"Your Royal Highness does not observe that the Blue Domino and the Circassian Slave are evidently talking together in an enamoured strain," said Germain; "and that the Flower Girl is watching them with a mingled intentness and agitation which menace a scene and an exposure."

"No, she is too well bred to create a disturbance, Germain," replied the prince. "I will stake my existence that such exquisite graces, such ineffable charms, such ravishing attitudes, full of modesty and elegance, do not belong to one who will go into hysterics, set up a screaming, call her treacherous lover by harsh names aloud, or tear her rival's eyes out. No, all will pass off quietly enough."

"Your Royal Highness is correct," exclaimed Germain, in a hurried whisper; "for behold, the Blue Domino and the Circassian Slave are hastening away together, and —"

"Ah! my God, the poor Flower Girl is supporting herself against the wall," cried the prince. "What an opportunity to form her acquaintance!"

And he was already darting toward her, to catch her in his arms and save her from falling, when a female masque, clad as a Gipsy, glided suddenly past him and hurried up to the Flower Girl.

The prince stopped short, muttered an oath of impatience, and then fell back a few paces to rejoin Germain.

"Your Royal Highness was anticipated in your good intentions by that Gipsy with the pretty figure and the picturesque attire," said the valet.

"Yes, perdition upon the Gipsy!" exclaimed the prince. "But the manner in which she accosted the Flower Girl seems to bespeak another phase in her adventures of this

evening, and we will continue to watch the fair one's movements for the present."

"So as to seize upon any incident which may transpire to the furtherance of our aims," added the valet.

But let us now draw our readers' attention a little more closely to the Flower Girl herself.

It was perfectly true that she was leaning against the wall for support, indeed, to save herself from sinking upon the floor, so overwhelming were the emotions under which she laboured. The deepest affliction and the heaviest weight of sorrow appeared to have fallen upon her on beholding the excellent understanding which evidently subsisted between the Blue Domino and the Circassian Slave; and when she saw them depart together, a species of vertigo seized upon her, her brain became dizzy, her sight failed her, and she felt as if all the chords which bound her immortal spirit to its mortal tenement were snapping with a fearful rapidity.

Suddenly a hand was laid gently upon her shoulder, and a soft voice said, soothingly, "Dear lady, remember where you are, command yourself, control your feelings, I implore you."

"And who are you, kind being?" asked the Flower Girl, exerting all her energies to regain her self-possession.

"I am one who knows you well," was the response, delivered in the same gentle tone as before.

The Flower Girl now regarded the Gipsy more attentively, and perceived that she was short in stature, beautifully symmetrical, and evidently young. Her face was carefully concealed by her mask; but fine dark eyes flashed through the holes, brilliant teeth were visible behind an aperture which that wizard had for the respiration, and luxuriant black hair was arranged in massive bands beneath the gipsy-hat which the female wore with a ravishing coquetry. v!

The eyes of the Flower Girl swept over the Gipsy in order to recognize her, if possible, by the traits of the figure, the stature, and as much as could be thus observed beneath her picturesque costume; but it was evident that the former could not call to mind any one within the circle of her acquaintance on whom she was able to fix and identify as the Gipsy.

"You know me well," said the Flower Girl, at length; "but are you equally well known to me?"

"No, lady, you are totally unacquainted with me, except

by name," was the response; "and that name," added the Gipsy, evidently endeavouring to smother a sigh, "is, alas! too well known throughout the land."

"Singular being! what mean you?" demanded the Flower Girl. "And wherefore do you interest yourself in me? Is it possible that you are the writer of —"

"That anonymous note which induced you to come hither, eh?" said the Gipsy, a certain malignity penetrating through her tone and manner, and suddenly causing the Flower Girl to regard her with a less friendly interest than before. "Well, and you have seen with your own eyes the truth of all I told you in that note? But you did wrong to accost him, after my positive injunctions to the contrary."

"There was a moment when I could not control my feelings," said the Flower Girl, now sighing profoundly at the painful recollections of all that had so recently taken place and which even now appeared to her in the light of a horrid dream, and not a reality that was patent and undeniable. "But wherefore did you enjoin me in that note not to accost him within these walls, but to deliberate calmly ere I took any step in consequence of his infidelity? Did you suppose that I possessed an almost superhuman power of control over my feelings? Or rather, let me ask wherefore you should have interfered in this matter at all?"

"Those are my secrets, lady," said the Gipsy, assuming a tone of the profoundest mystery. "And now one word of advice."

"Speak," said the Flower Girl, with a cold and unaccountable shudder, for there was something implacable and even ferocious in the altered tone and manner of the Gipsy.

"When a virtuous woman's dignity is offended by a faithless lover," was the measured response of the latter, "she does not write a long letter of mingled complaint, upbraiding, and reproach; but she pens a few laconic words, commanding him to seek her presence no more, and leaving him to calculate and weigh all the motives which have suggested a proceeding at once so dignified and so imperious."

"You have told me nothing that my own feelings as an injured woman would not have suggested," said the Flower Girl. "Have you aught more to observe, and shall I ever know who you are and what were your motives?"

"Yes, in time you shall know everything," exclaimed the Gipsy; and hurrying away, she was soon lost to the view of the Flower Girl in the thickest of the laughing, jesting, moving multitude of masqueraders.

"Now the fair one is again alone," said his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to his faithful valet Germain, both of them having stood to observe the preceding scene from a short distance.

"The adventure draws toward a crisis, so far as the hopes and aims of your Royal Highness are concerned," replied Germain.

At this instant the Flower Girl, who had remained motionless in the deep abstraction of her feelings for nearly a minute after the Gipsy had left her, suddenly quitted the spot where she had been standing; and, avoiding the crowd as much as possible, issued from the brilliant scene.

Rapid was her pace, and with a visible anxiety to escape from the theatre did she hurry onward. Neither to the right nor to the left did she look; much less was a glance thrown behind her, and therefore she did not perceive that a man in a black domino was closely following her.

On the landing she received her cloak from the woman in charge of the superfluous apparel of the visitors; and, enveloping herself in the warm mantle, but still retaining her mask, she descended the grand staircase and passed out of the theatre.

"Carriage waiting, ma'am? Hackney-coach? Cab?" cried one of the numerous hangers-on about the place.

"A hackney-coach, if you please," was the response.

"Now then, fust coach there," exclaimed the fellow; and up drove a vehicle, into which the Flower Girl immediately ascended. "Where to, ma'am?" was the next and last demand.

"To some respectable hotel," replied the Flower Girl, after a few moments' reflection.

"All right," ejaculated the man, banging the door and touching his hat for the silver coin which the Flower Girl dropped into his hand.

And away drove the hackney-coach; but Germain, who had stripped off his mask and domino, was seated by the side of the coachman upon the box; and after a few minutes' conversation together, the valet handed five guineas to that

individual, who secured them about his person, chuckling at the handsome amount of the bribe given for so easy a service as that which was required from him.

In about ten minutes the coach stopped; and down jumped Germain to open the door.

"What hotel is this?" inquired the Flower Girl, looking up and observing what appeared to be only a row of handsome private houses.

"The St. James's Family Hotel, ma'am," said Germain, officiously letting down the steps and handing the Flower Girl out of the vehicle.

Meantime the coachman had rung and knocked at the house door, which was almost instantaneously opened; and the appearance of a female servant with a candle in her hand reassured the Flower Girl, if indeed she had even for a moment entertained a suspicion that anything was wrong.

The night was piercing cold, eleven o'clock had struck, and therefore it was no wonder if Germain hurried the Flower Girl into the house; while the promptitude of his proceedings and the despatch which characterized the attentions he thus appeared to be showing to the lady, left her not an instant to ask herself who the courteous and obliging individual could possibly be. But as the light, which the female servant held in her hand, flashed upon his countenance, it instantly struck the Flower Girl that his features were not altogether unfamiliar to her. Still she had no time to pause and reflect where or when she had seen that genteel-looking man in black before; for the female servant began to lead the way up a handsome and well-lighted staircase.

The Flower Girl followed mechanically, and she had just begun to reflect that it was somewhat extraordinary that such prompt and even officious attentions should be shown her, a stranger though she were at the house and not having even opened her lips to express what she required, coming, too, alone at that hour of the night and in a masquerade dress; upon all these points had she begun to reflect, we say, and a distant suspicion had even raised its nascent glimmering in her mind, when the servant threw open the door of an apartment, saying, "Walk in, if you please, madam."

The Flower Girl paused for an instant; then, feeling how

ridiculous her hesitation would seem if her faint misgiving should prove unfounded, she threw her cloak upon a chair on the landing and advanced boldly forward.

The door closed behind her. She found herself in a large, handsomely furnished, and well-lighted room, and a tall figure, disguised in the garb of a Turk and wearing a mask upon his countenance, advanced to receive her.

"There must be some terrible mistake in all this," exclaimed the Flower Girl, stepping back and glancing around uneasily toward the door.

"No, charming lady," said the Turk, "there is no mistake, I can assure you. A little stratagem has been adopted, it is true, but you will pardon me, I feel convinced. And now let me introduce myself to you as Mr. Harley," added the prince, removing the mask from his features.

"And I," said the lady, whose whole frame had quivered violently when the familiar sound of the heir apparent's voice first struck upon her ears, but who had recovered all her self-command and natural strength of mind ere he had brought his speech to a conclusion, "and I," she exclaimed, slowly removing the satin mask from her own countenance, "am Pauline Clarendon."

CHAPTER XLI

THE HEIR APPARENT AND THE SISTER OF HIS VICTIM

A SUDDEN stupefaction appeared to seize upon the Prince of Wales the moment that the melodious but firm voice of Pauline breathed her well-known name and that her fair hand took the satin covering from her lovely face.

Shame and humiliation were the first feelings which he experienced as the stupor of astonishment began to subside; and then the fiendish thought suddenly struck him that as Pauline was ravishingly beautiful, there was no reason why he should not make an attempt upon her virtue.

On the other hand, the hatred which Pauline Clarendon bore toward the Prince of Wales, whom she loathed and detested as the cause of her sister's ruin and misfortune, inspired her with feelings which not only prevented her from experiencing any apprehension on account of the position wherein she was now placed, but even prompted her to seize this opportunity of unfolding her sentiments upon certain matters.

"Upon my soul, this is the most remarkable coincidence that ever happened," exclaimed the Prince of Wales, at length. "But did you not observe me at the masquerade just now, Pauline?"

"Base and black indeed must your heart be," said the young lady, every lovely lineament of her countenance expressing the magnitude of the resentment and aversion which filled her soul, "since you can so readily adopt a tone of insolent familiarity toward the sister of your victim."

"You know that I am profoundly grieved for all that has happened in respect to Octavia," said the prince; "but I really could not help it. 'Twas an ordinary case of love and gallantry, the circumstances of which afterward ex-

panded into an importance and assumed a gravity which I could neither foresee nor prevent."

"The very observations which you have just made, Prince of Wales," exclaimed Pauline, bitterly, "prove the truth of my assertion relative to the blackness and baseness of your heart."

"Your words are more than rude, young lady," said the heir apparent, biting his lip; "but I do not feel disposed to suffer them to goad me into anger. On the contrary, I had rather that you should unburden your bosom of all and everything you may have to allege against me, and then, perhaps, the calmer discourse which will follow may tend to place us upon a more friendly footing together."

"There is a certain ambiguity in the latter portion of your remarks which I do not choose to understand," said the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon, drawing her fine form up to its full height and assuming the dignified hauteur of a virtue conscious of its own power. "But I will avail myself of your permission," she continued, with a subdued irony in her tone, "to make a few observations on the past. Your Royal Highness has dared ere now to assimilate the case of my unhappy sister to those thousand and one instances of man's depravity and woman's weakness which are such ordinary episodes in the routine of society. But let me tell you, Prince of Wales, that in this particular amour to which I allude, the man's treachery was steeped in the blackness of Satan's own iniquity, and the woman's frailty was attended by circumstances as palliative in respect to herself as they are pathetic and touching to contemplate or describe. For Octavia loved you, loved you tenderly and devotedly, — not as the heir apparent to the British throne, but as plain, untitled, and obscure Mr. Harley. Yes, she loved you for yourself only, believing you to be a private gentleman with nothing extraordinary in your social position. On the contrary, she gave you her heart when you came to our house under circumstances calculated to engender suspicions rather than favourable notions relative to your character; for, if you choose to tax your memory with details doubtless so trifling to one in your position," continued Pauline, her tone of reproach again becoming tinged with irony, "you will recollect the tale you told us of debts incurred for a friend and a flight from the bailiffs who sought

to arrest you for those liabilities. Well, then, it was not as a prince nor even as a rich man that Octavia regarded you when she gave you her virgin love. No, it was as a simple gentleman, whose pecuniary affairs seemed at least to be involved in embarrassment; it was as the fugitive from pursuing harpies of the law that you were thus admitted into the sanctuary of her soul. And when once you had obtained admission there, oh, how soon, how soon did you rifle that shrine of the only gem which it possessed! How prompt and how tremendous was the havoc made by your sacrilegious hand! How remorseless was the vandalism of that ruin which you left in a temple where all was bright and holy, pure and uncorrupted, until then!"

"Pauline, you know that I could not repair by marriage the injury which I had done to your sister," said the prince, somewhat touched by the young lady's reproaches, but assuming a more contrite tone and humbled manner in order to move her by that semblance of penitence and sorrow. "I confess that my conduct was wrong, very wrong, but I beseech you to consider that I was hurried on by an infatuation which I could not control, a passion which swept me along as if with the force of a torrent; and I solemnly swear, Pauline, that had Satan demanded my soul as the price of Octavia's love, I should have madly embraced the compact. Pity me, therefore, while you blame me —"

"Ah! Prince of Wales," interrupted the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon, "your tongue is so used to the ready utterance of passionate avowals that the same language, with a few trifling verbal alterations, serves likewise in an apologetic sense. But I am not to be deluded by your sophistry; and therefore do I tell your Royal Highness to your face that the heartless treachery practised by you toward my sister constitutes one of the blackest chapters in your life."

"Pauline, I will not hear any more," exclaimed the heir apparent, now unable to curb his wrath.

"I thought that you had generously accorded me permission to give full vent to my feelings and sentiments upon this topic," said the young lady, her rich red lips wreathing into a satirical smile.

"Proceed, then, proceed," cried the prince, subduing his impatience as well as he was able. Then to himself he said,

"By Heaven! she is ravishing in that garb, ay, and also in that angry mood; and I will gratify my vengeance for all these reproaches at the same time that I will appease the flame of this new passion which devours me."

"I have but little more to say," continued Pauline, who was too much absorbed in the engrossing topic of her sister's wrongs to observe the peculiar nature of the preoccupation which seized upon the prince while he was thus musing to himself. "But I cannot depart hence nor suffer this opportunity to escape without protesting, solemnly protesting, alike in my sister's name and in my own, against that scandalous compromise which, although my own parent was a party to it, I cannot do otherwise than denounce in the strongest terms. Alas! alas! that my infatuated father, dazzled by the false light of empty honours and ruled by the designing woman whom he has made his wife, should have consented to receive a title as the atonement and the propitiation for his outraged daughter's wrongs. But that your Royal Highness may not think so ill of me nor do me so foul an act of injustice as to suppose that I rejoice in the sudden elevation of my family to the rank of nobility, I now solemnly declare that I look with loathing, with abhorrence, and with a shame, upon this gilding which has been spread over an indelible disgrace; and while my heart sickens at the thought that my own father could accept such a compensation for so immeasurable a wrong, I likewise hold in boundless contempt that royal family who could have dared in the first instance to offer the miserable bauble of a coronet in return for the priceless gem of a woman's virtue."

"And now, Pauline, you have said all that you have to say," observed the prince, with the coolness and heartless indifference of a thorough libertine, "and you will perhaps permit me to speak. But shall we not be seated?" he asked; for throughout the preceding dialogue they had remained standing at a short distance from each other.

"No," replied Pauline; "our interview will terminate in a few minutes, and I am not so wearied that I cannot dispense with a seat while listening to anything that you may have to say."

"Be it so," exclaimed the prince, for a moment abashed, embarrassed, and even overawed by that dignity which

the young lady wore, as it were, without an effort, and which made her as a mere woman more powerful in a moral sense than he was as a prince; but casting off that strange influence which thus dominated him for nearly a minute, he said, "You have reproached me at great length for my conduct toward Octavia, and you have likewise repudiated all idea of adhesion to that species of tacit compromise which has made your father a peer. Well, I have already admitted that my behaviour in respect to your sister was improper and even cruel; and if you can show me what reparation I, as a prince, and as the heir apparent to the throne of these realms, can make, you have but to name your demand. Then, as for the compromise, I frankly and candidly acknowledge my conviction that you have spoken the truth in denouncing and disavowing it. But while I thus do justice to your own independence of spirit and virtuous indignation of feeling," continued the prince, in a tone of courteous hauteur, "I do not hesitate to declare my opinion that since your father is satisfied with the arrangements which have been made, you have no longer a right to complain. Octavia belongs to her sire, and not to her sister."

"Contemptible sophistry!" ejaculated Pauline, her beautiful countenance becoming red with indignation; and the crimson glow suffused itself over her neck and all that was visible of her virgin bosom.

"Well, it may sound like sophistry to your ears," said the prince, in an easy and familiar tone, as if he knew that not only the argument was on his side, but that he had a means in reserve of humbling that lovely girl so dignified and so strong in the consciousness of her virtue. "It is also the opinion of the world and the expression of the law that I thus enunciate; for the parent alone could commence an action for the seduction of his daughter. But let us now take leave of this subject and pass on to another. I presume you fully comprehend that it was in consequence of a stragem you were brought hither?" said the heir apparent, with the coolest effrontery imaginable.

"I know that you are capable of any villainy, prince," returned Pauline, a slight shudder passing over her frame as she was thus reminded of the circumstances of her position at so late an hour; but, instantaneously assuming the calm demeanour of courage and self-possession, she said, "Never-

theless, bad as you are, I can scarcely suppose you capable of persevering in an evil intention toward one who turns out to be the sister of your unhappy victim."

"Candidly speaking, my dear Pauline," answered the prince, whose desires were excited almost to madness by the charms of the young lady, "I fell in love with you at the masquerade solely from the contemplation of your beauteous figure and the indescribable graces of your person; and now that your countenance beams upon me in all its glory, I am not likely to abandon the enchanting hope of possessing you, even though the removal of that mask has revealed to me the features of Pauline Clarendon."

"This language — to me!" exclaimed the young lady, once more becoming crimson with indignation, while her whole form shook as if with a strong spasm passing through it.

"Yes, to you, Pauline," cried the prince, his libidinous looks gloating upon the charms that were set off so ravishingly by the picturesque costume which displayed rather than concealed them. "And now, without hypocrisy, without subterfuge, without circumlocution, let me tell you, frankly and resolutely, that your beauty has excited me to a frenetic pitch, and that you shall be mine, be the consequences what they may."

"Villain!" ejaculated Pauline, now seriously alarmed; and she flew to the door.

"The bird escapes me not thus easily," cried the prince, in a triumphant tone, as the young maiden fruitlessly endeavoured to open the door, which had been locked on the other side. "Come, Pauline, you are a being endowed with good sense and a strong intellect, and you can listen to reason. May I crave your patience for a few moments?"

And his Royal Highness leaned against the chimneypiece with the cool complacency of a man who is certain of achieving a victory, or who has the game in his own hands.

"Reason?" ejaculated Pauline, summoning to her aid all the courage and self-possession which she now felt to be requisite to meet the dangers and difficulties of her position; and, moving slowly away from the door, she advanced toward the prince with an air of confidence which she did not, however, in reality feel. "Yes, I can listen to reason;

but I am at a loss to conceive how anything which you may have to say to me can deserve that denomination."

"We shall see," said the heir apparent. "And let me begin by informing you that I watched all your movements and proceedings ere now at the masquerade, and I saw enough to convince me that you have no reason to be satisfied with the conduct of the Blue Domino. So long as I remained in ignorance who the fair Flower Girl could be, I was of course unable to penetrate entirely into the mystery of those proceedings; but now that I know her to be the beautiful Miss Pauline Clarendon, I come to the very natural conclusion that the Blue Domino must have been her fickle, inconstant, and faithless lover, the young Lord Florimel. Ah! I see by your countenance that my surmise is correct."

"And wherefore do you thus torture me with these allusions? Wherefore do you seek to probe the anguish which so much perfidy has excited in my breast?" exclaimed Pauline, in an impassioned tone, and the tears started forth upon her long lashes while her bosom heaved and fell convulsively.

"I was about to observe, my dear Pauline," resumed the prince, "that —"

"Your Royal Highness will be pleased to forbear from addressing me with a familiarity not warranted by circumstances," said the young lady, in a resolute tone.

"Well, then, I will call you the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon, your father being a peer," observed the prince, with a satirical smile.

"Proceed, proceed," cried the young maiden, impatiently. "I am anxious to depart hence. What more has your Royal Highness to say to me, for as yet I have heard none of the reason to which you requested me to listen."

"Because you have interrupted me," rejoined the prince. "For I was about to observe that as Lord Florimel has evidently proved faithless to you, and as his conduct was positively outrageous and cruel to a degree, it is impossible that you, a young lady of high spirit and independent disposition, can tamely submit to so gross an insult as to behold your rival, whoever she might be, preferred before your very face, ay, and in defiance of anything that you may have said to the young nobleman when you accosted him so abruptly and then quitted him in such evident anger.

What, then, should you do to be avenged upon the perfidious Florimel, and which species of vengeance would be the most complete? Can you not understand me, Pauline? If not I must speak more plainly, and in measured words and intelligible language must I recommend that you retaliate in the same spirit and after the same fashion. Become my mistress, accept my protection, and then, when dashing around the park in your splendid equipage, or seated in your box at the opera, you may look scorn, defiance, and contempt at the faithless Florimel."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Pauline, in a tone vibrating with the terrible indignation which convulsed her entire form and made her face, her neck, and her bosom turn the hue of a peony all in a moment; "wretch! is it possible that you can hold such language to the sister of the too confiding girl whom your villainy has robbed alike of her virtue and her intellects? Oh, if I did not interrupt you ere the sentence which contained the odious proposition was completed, if I did not burst forth at once in all the fury of my outraged and insulted spirit, it was that amazement paralyzed my tongue. Almighty God, is it possible — oh, is it possible that this man shall one day reign over the people of England?"

"Yes, by Heaven, will I, for you and all the people of England together were made to become my slaves," exclaimed the prince, yielding to a sudden access of rage. "And now, Miss Pauline Clarendon, the prude, the pattern maiden, the chaste damsel *par excellence*, I will teach you that what I have said is true, and that you were born to be subservient to my desires. No more of your sentimental trash concerning your sister; for your father has reaped his reward. Yes, and even as a barony sufficed as an atonement for Octavia's defoliated virtue, an earldom will be clutched by him as ample recompense for Pauline's honour."

"Ah! you throw off the mask completely, prince? You proclaim yourself a villain?" cried Pauline, speaking in a tone which sounded like that of calm defiance, but which was really that of despair. "No, you cannot mean to perpetrate such an outrage. Besides, even if you should attempt it, I will resist until the very death. I will alarm the house, my screams shall rouse the neighbourhood, or, as a last resource, I will leap from the window."

And as she uttered these words in a voice which had risen from the dull tone of despair to the excitement of an hysterical frenzy, she sprang toward the casement, tore aside the curtains, and rushed into the recess to throw open the window. But her hands only encountered the shutters, and she felt that the iron bar which went across them was fastened with a padlock.

Staggering back into the room, baffled, disappointed, and with an increasing terror gaining upon her, the unhappy Pauline vainly endeavoured to recall her self-possession. The laugh of the prince rang half-triumphantly, half-mockingly in her ears, and a voice seemed to whisper in her soul that she was undone.

"My dear girl," said his Royal Highness, who was still lounging negligently before the fire and had not moved a step to retain her when she flew so wildly toward the window, "you must think me very foolish, indeed, if you imagine that the smallest avenue of escape is left for you. No, no; though ignorant that I had to deal with a stubborn and obstinate prude, yet I came hither with all imaginable speed to make preparations for your arrival, the moment I saw you safely ensconced in the hackney-coach and my faithful Germain mounted on the box."

"Ah!" ejaculated Pauline, "methought that man's face was not unfamiliar to me. But, O God! have mercy upon me," she cried, clasping her hands in despair, "for the wickedness of my persecutors is triumphing in every point."

"And the conquest will be speedily achieved, dearest Pauline," exclaimed the prince, "despite of your screams, your entreaties, your resistance. But rather, oh, much rather would I that you should come a willing sacrifice to my arms, tender, yielding, and submissive, obedient to that destiny which you cannot resist, making a merit of necessity, and abandoning yourself to the full enjoyment of those ecstatic pleasures —"

"Oh, horror!" moaned the unhappy girl, sinking upon her knees and still clasping her hands with the wildness of despair. "What, will no one come to my assistance? Is it possible that these walls can beat back my screams, my cries for help —"

"Pauline, you must be mad to hope for succour in this house," interrupted the prince, with a smile of almost

fiendish satisfaction; "for if you have not already guessed that you are an inmate of the hospitable dwelling of Mrs. Brace —"

"Mrs. Brace!" repeated the wretched Pauline, springing from her knees to her feet as if she were suddenly electrified; for well she knew that fatal name in connection with her beloved sister's ruin. "O God! have mercy upon me!" she exclaimed, and then, obedient to the impulse of feelings worked up to a pitch of the most excruciating anguish, she burst forth into screams which would have pierced through the thickest dungeon wall.

"Peace, silly fool!" cried the prince, now rushing forward and winding his arms around her form. Then, straining her with a species of maddening and ferocious violence to his breast, he exclaimed, "I will stifle thy shrieks with kisses."

And as he glued his lips, hot and parched with the fever of burning lust, to her delicious mouth, her senses abandoned her, and she remained powerless and inanimate in his arms.

CHAPTER XLII

THE HACKNEY-COACH AND THE PRIVATE CARRIAGE

GRIEVED as we are to leave the reader in a state of suspense relative to the issue of the adventure of Pauline Clarendon and the Prince of Wales, we must nevertheless break the thread of that episode for a short space and return to Covent Garden Theatre.

We left Lord Montgomery and the Circassian Slave at the moment when, having issued from the scene of the masquerade, they stopped in a corridor to enable the lady to breathe the fresh air which circulated in that place.

Speedily recovering, and no longer requiring any beverage to quench a thirst that had for a moment seemed intolerable, the Circassian Slave took Montgomery's arm again, and they now proceeded to quit the theatre. Down the grand staircase they went, that man wrapped in the mystery of the blue domino, and that woman whose splendid form was set off to such brilliant advantage by the Oriental garb that she wore. And Lord Montgomery felt proud as well as happy in the companionship of this superb creature, the flexible grace and soft voluptuousness of whose entire figure attracted the gaze of the loungers upon the stairs and in the vestibule; and as he felt her bosom press gently against his shoulder, he hastened his pace—her own, of course, at the same time—in order to be alone with her as speedily as possible.

"Is your carriage in attendance, dear lady?" he asked, in the same low and assumed tone which he had all along adopted.

"Not here, Gabriel," was the softly uttered response. "We must take a hackney-coach in the first instance."

"Be it so, dear lady," observed the nobleman. "But have you no cloak to protect yourself against the cold?"

"Ah! I forgot, 'tis upon the landing above," said the Circassian Slave, stopping short at the foot of the staircase as she thus spoke. "Here is the duplicate ticket which I received from the woman who takes charge of the cloaks."

"One moment and I will return," said Lord Montgomery; and, taking the little piece of pasteboard, he hastened up the staircase.

The next instant a tall footman in dark livery accosted the Circassian Slave, and with a respectful salutation, said, "Is the carriage to take up your ladyship here?"

"No, Mason," immediately replied the Circassian Slave. "You will wait for me in Great Russell Street, close by the British Museum; and you will be upon the watch for a hackney-coach. I shall not be alone, and you will adopt with promptitude all the necessary precautions."

The lady spoke with a peculiar significance, which the domestic evidently comprehended full well; and, touching his hat, he instantaneously disappeared. In a few moments Lord Montgomery rejoined the lady, over whose shoulders he threw the handsome cloak which he had been to fetch, and the forgetting of which was a mere stratagem on her part in order to gain the opportunity of issuing her commands to the footman relative to the carriage.

Enveloped in her mantle and leaning upon Montgomery's arm, she now issued from the theatre; and, a hackney-coach being summoned, the disguised pair entered it together.

"Where to, sir?" demanded the driver, addressing the nobleman.

"Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, and stop opposite the Museum," the lady hastened to reply; and away went the coach.

"Oh, my dearest friend," murmured Lord Montgomery, now taking the plump, warm hand of his companion and pressing it fervently in his own, "how can I sufficiently thank you for thus remembering me and condescending to renew the ineffable delights of that first occasion when you made me so supremely happy. Ere now in the theatre I had no time to express to you all the gratitude I experience, all the raptures which you have excited in my soul, all the bliss which you have poured into my heart. But now,

the first moment that we are really alone together, I hasten to give you the fondest, tenderest, and most fervid assurances of gratitude, love, adoration. Oh, lady, never have I forgotten, even for an instant, those four hours of Elysian enjoyment which I tasted in your arms; and my soul can scarcely believe that so much happiness is in store for it once again, but trembles lest it should awaken from a delicious dream and find all the ecstatic thoughts which now fill it oozing rapidly away, and all the warmth of its blissful emotions turning into the iciness of a stern disappointment."

no!
In this strain did Earl Montgomery continue to speak for some time, his purpose being to postpone as long as possible that moment so perilous to his hopes and his entire stratagem, when the truth must be revealed and the tremendous discovery would be made that he was not Lord Florimel. For he had already calculated that if he were only allowed the leisure and the opportunity to excite the passions of this woman whose nature was so ardent and whose desires were so uncontrollable, he would be certain to carry out his adventure to a successful issue and triumph over any feeling of anger or alarm which the discovery of the imposture might raise up in the bosom of the wanton lady. In a word, his purpose was to reduce her to the absolute necessity of accepting himself as a substitute for the lover whom she hoped to meet; and as he pretty well guessed that the ride in a hackney-coach to Great Russell Street was only one of the many precautions which the crafty lady was wont to adopt, and that some other vehicle would receive them at that spot in order to convey them elsewhere, he calculated that it would be far more conducive to the success of his scheme to maintain the cheat until they were within close vicinage of their ultimate destination, wherever it might be.

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And fortunate, perhaps, was it for the success of the earl's stratagem that the lady had taken the hired vehicle in the first instance. For had she at once entered her own carriage in company with Montgomery, she would have instantaneously taken off her mask and torn the satin vizard likewise away from his countenance, in order to pour forth her voluptuous soul in the caresses which she would have lavished upon him. His whiskers would then have revealed to her all in a moment that he was not the young

nobleman whom she had hoped and expected to meet; and in the first fury of her rage, terror, and disappointment, she might have indignantly ordered the intruder to quit her carriage, a command which, as a gentleman, he would have been bound to obey.

Such might have been the sudden result of the adventure had the private carriage been used in the first instance. But, as it was, the Circassian Slave did not think it worth while to disturb her own mask immediately, inasmuch as it would be necessary to resume it again on passing from the hackney-coach to the carriage. She accordingly restrained her longings to press her lips to those of her companion; and, contenting herself by reclining her head on his shoulder and abandoning her hand to his pressure, she listened in a dreamy and sensuous rapture to the glowing language which he poured into her ears with all the deep tenderness of his whispering voice.

In a little less than ten minutes the hackney-coach stopped; and Montgomery heard some one say to the driver, "You need not get down, I will open the door, and here is your fare."

Immediately afterward the door of the hackney-coach was opened by a tall man who had on a great coat such as was worn in those times by footmen in livery; and his hat was put on in such a way as to shade his countenance. Montgomery instantly remembered the tall lackey mentioned by Lord Florimel, and felt convinced that this was the same.

The moment the door of the vehicle was opened, the Circassian Slave hastened to alight, and the earl immediately followed her. The instant his feet touched the pavement, he darted a rapid glance up and down the street, to ascertain if a carriage were in attendance; and he had just time to observe that there was an equipage standing in the deep shade thrown by the gateway of the British Museum, when the hood of his domino was pulled completely over his mask and he was thus involved in utter darkness. At the same moment he heard the hackney-coach drive away; and he was then hurried along toward the spot where he had observed the carriage standing.

The vigorous arms which thus dealt so unceremoniously with him again reminded him of Lord Florimel's history,

and seemed to confirm his belief that the man in the greatcoat and the slouched hat was the same tall footman who figured in that narrative.

Into the carriage was he now promptly hoisted; and as the door closed behind him, he was received in the arms of the lady, who had already taken her place in the vehicle.

"My own dearest Gabriel," she exclaimed, in a tone full of passion and joy and anxious longing, as the carriage drove rapidly away, "we may now embrace each other and exchange kisses of love and tenderness."

And as she thus spoke, she threw back the hood of Montgomery's domino, tore the mask from his countenance, and glued her lips to his mouth with all that frenzied ardour and devouring fury which Lord Florimel had so glowingly described.

"Pardon, pardon, dearest lady," murmured the earl, straining her to his breast.

"O God! who are you?" she cried, with a faint shriek; and tearing herself from his arms, she appeared to fall back upon the opposite seat in a state of utter annihilation.

The nobleman fell upon his knees in the carriage and took her hand, which was abandoned to him as if by one in a dream or in a mood of utter listlessness. He pressed it to his lips, and he felt that it was warm, although it trembled not nor indicated any emotion on the part of its owner. But that she had not fainted he could tell by its soft, warm contact; and, moreover, he heard the low but quick and stifling manner of her respirations. The interior of the vehicle was dark as pitch; but by all that we have just explained, the earl judged that the lady must have fallen into that state of mingled despair and bewilderment which occasions a total helplessness.

"Pardon me, adorable woman, pardon me," he exclaimed, throwing as much tender entreaty as possible into that manly tone which he no longer sought to disguise. "It is true that Lord Florimel kneels not at your feet, but he who has taken his place and now implores your compassion, your forbearance, your mercy, is as honourable a man. And what is more, I may without vanity declare that in personal appearance I am not deficient in some of nature's bounties. Whether my manners are those of a vulgarian or a gentleman, I leave you to judge; and as for my rank, it

is even superior to that of Lord Florimel. But if you would ask me whether I can appreciate as well as he the full amount of that happiness which is to be enjoyed in your society, if you should entertain any misgivings with regard to the obedience I may be disposed to pay to the terms and conditions you will impose upon me, and if you doubt the prudence of trusting yourself to a stranger under circumstances so strange, oh, I beseech you to be reassured on those points, I implore you to place your confidence in me, and you will render me the happiest as well as the most devoted of mortals."

As Lord Montgomery was giving utterance to this impassioned address, he gradually drew himself in closer contact with the lady who was half-sitting and half-reclining on the seat. He leaned softly toward her, he passed his left arm gradually around her form, still retaining her hand clasped in his right, and he at length approached his own countenance to her burning cheek. Then at last he felt her whole frame vibrate; and drawing her still more closely toward him, he ventured to fasten his lips to hers.

For a few moments she appeared to abandon herself to the ecstatic feelings with which that long and sensuous kiss inspired her; but, as if all in a moment awakening to a full sense of her position with a stranger and to a keen appreciation of the infamous trick which had been played upon her, she started from the earl's embrace and repulsed him violently, exclaiming, in a tone profoundly troubled, "Who are you?"

"I am a friend of Lord Florimel, dear lady," was the response delivered in a voice of tender appeal and mournful entreaty; "and I happened to be at his house when the masquerade-ticket and the domino arrived. The conversation which ensued led him to narrate the adventure of love and mystery that happened to him fifteen months ago; and when he declared that his engagement to the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon would not permit him to keep the appointment so unmistakably signified through the medium of the masquerade-ticket and the blue domino, the idea struck me that if he were so stoical as to refuse the bliss of heaven I would at least make a desperate effort to secure that enjoyment for myself."

"And was he privy to your imposture? Did he lend him-

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self to your treachery?" demanded the lady, in a low, deep tone which afforded no indication of the feeling that she now entertained toward the earl, neither encouraging him in hope nor yet confirming him in despair; and as the darkness of the tomb prevailed in the vehicle, he had no means of judging her emotions save by her voice, which thus suddenly ceased to be an index.

"No, lady," he said, in answer to her question. "Lord Florimel is utterly ignorant of my present proceeding, and I hope to God that he will remain so. Intimate as I am with him, it was easy for me to obtain possession of this blue domino; and I trusted to my own prudence and your kindness for the rest. And will you not believe me when I assure you that, although I have not seen your features and am never likely to obtain a glimpse of them, yet that I already love you with an ardour, oh, with an ardour which would make me undertake any enterprise and dare any peril to render you a service, while not even the temptation of a sovereign crown should induce me to do you harm. Permit me, then, to love you, my worshipped unknown, permit me to be thy slave, thou being so full of mystery. For the graces of thy form have captivated my heart and ravished my senses, and I already picture to myself a countenance of corresponding beauty. Without, therefore, even beholding that countenance, I can love thee well, oh, well, dear lady; for I can paint in imagination those features which I deem fit and suitable for one possessing so noble a form, and thus my happiness will be complete. Will you, then, scorn such a love as this? Will you reject a passion so earnest, so tender, and so profound? No; but you will pardon me for anything savouring of treachery that there may have been in my conduct, you will forgive me for the imposture which I practised in order to obtain this introduction to thee. For my imagination was so inflamed by the narrative which I received from the lips of Lord Florimel that I was absolutely tortured with an excruciating curiosity to form thine acquaintance, yes, and maddened with a burning desire to obtain thy love. My crime, then, has been to adore thee from hearsay, to worship thee on account of all I heard concerning thee from another; and surely there is something delicately flattering and touchingly complimentary in all this, which would disarm even the

most imperious and haughty woman of her indignation. Speak, lady, oh, speak, and tell me what I am to expect; but remember that this passion which I now experience is stronger than myself, and terrible indeed would prove its disappointment and its despair."

At the moment when Earl Montgomery commenced this long address, the lady had withdrawn herself altogether from the slightest contact with him. Not a portion of her Oriental garb touched his blue domino, at least, so far as she could prevent such contiguity in the total darkness of the carriage. But by degrees as he spoke, and his voice gradually grew more tender, his language more impassioned, and his manner more appealing, he insinuated himself closer and closer to the Circassian Slave; and she evidently became interested in his speech and evinced a soft yielding in her own conduct, by not withdrawing herself in proportion as he drew nearer to her. Thus was it that his hand presently touched her own, and the earl felt every nerve in his frame vibrate with pleasure at the warm contact. Then he took that hand, and gently, gently he sank down until he was upon his knees again, and he pressed the hand to his heart as he continued in the fervid strain which we have described.

By degrees he felt the hand trembling in his own, then the arm was more completely abandoned to him; and gradually did he become aware that the entire form of the lady was approaching nearer and nearer toward him. At length her breath fanned his cheek, he could even hear the pulsation of her heart as its beating indicated the trouble of conflicting emotions, and in a few instants a smooth forehead was laid upon his own. Then with apparent timidity did he circle her waist with his arms; and as the last words of his impassioned appeal fell from his lips, she threw herself upon his breast, murmuring, in a faint and tremulous tone, "Yes, I pardon thee, I pardon thee."

Ecstatic was the thrill of triumph which passed through the form of Montgomery as these words fell upon his ears; and in the next moment, burning was the kiss which he imprinted upon the moist, plump mouth of his charming unknown. And he felt her entire person undulate with a soft, gradual, and sensuous writhing, as that kiss seemed to pour floods of transport in unto her soul; while low and

scarcely articulate accents of pleasure escaped in a continuous billing murmur from her lips, so that the depths of this ardent woman's passion resembled the cord of a harp which curls with a wavy movement and gives forth a gentle humming sound when thrown upon the scorching hearth.

But all of a sudden the mysterious unknown seemed to recollect herself again and once more recover at least a considerable portion, if not the whole, of her presence of mind; for gently but firmly disengaging herself from the nobleman's embrace, she said, "You have not yet told me who you are."

"Lady, it was an oversight, but unintentional, I can assure you," returned the patrician; "for, if you will remember, I alluded to my rank when I declared it to be superior to that of Lord Florimel."

"Then, without further preface, who are you?" demanded the lady, in a somewhat peremptory tone.

"I am the Earl Montgomery," was the response.

It seemed to the nobleman that a strong spasm shook the lady's form as he thus proclaimed himself; at least, he fancied that he caught that abrupt kind of start which is perceived in the midst of an intense darkness only by the sudden rustling which it occasions to the dress. But he was not sure; and as a profound silence and a complete immovability instantaneously followed on the part of the lady, he began to think that he must have been mistaken, and that instead of the announcement of his name and rank having produced any particular effect upon her, she was even now meditating what course she ought to pursue.

"She doubtless knows me by reputation," he thought within himself, "and she mistrusts me. She has perhaps heard that I am dissipated, gay, addicted to women, and loose in money matters, and she trembles at the idea of pushing this adventure any further. It is even possible that she may know me, that we are acquaintances, that we have met in the saloons of fashion, and that she entertains an antipathy toward me, or a dread that I should discover who she is. And yet I have not the slightest suspicion who she can be. But then, I am acquainted with so many ladies of splendid figure, and, moreover, those whom I have been accustomed to see in their ordinary apparel would appear in a different light and to greater or lesser advantage

in the fancy costume of a Circassian Slave. No, assuredly I cannot think of any one, within the range of my acquaintance, whom I can identify with my mysterious companion. Or rather, I remember a dozen whose superb forms would probably look equally well if similarly attired. But how can I pick out one of those and fix upon her as my unknown charmer opposite? No, all is mystery in that respect; and whether we are indeed known to each in the glittering world of fashion, or whether we are total strangers, her secret seems safe enough. Why, then, does she thus appear to hesitate?"

These reflections occupied about a minute, during which the Circassian Slave continued silent and motionless, as if she were plunged in the profoundest reverie.

"And you are Eugene Montgomery?" she at length said, with so peculiar an expression in her tone that the earl could not for the life of him at the moment determine whether it were indicative of satisfaction, swayed by astonishment, or influenced by vexation. "I have heard of your lordship, yes, I have heard of you — and report represents you as somewhat wild and unsteady. But still, you are handsome, yes, very handsome, Eugene," she continued, her voice suddenly becoming kind and tender beyond all possibility of mistake; "and your nature is fervid and impassioned. Oh, then let me hesitate no longer," she cried, in a gushing enthusiasm of voice, manner, and feelings, "but let me devote myself to love and pleasure, with you as my companion. Yes, Eugene, I pardon you for the perfidy which you practised in order to be received as a substitute for your friend; and I rely upon your honour that Lord Florimel shall remain ignorant of all this. Not that he is now anything to me, or ever was, otherwise than as the object of a transitory caprice which seized upon me fifteen months ago and which revived again this week. Nor do I dread discovery; for the precautions I adopted with him, and shall adopt this night with you, defy the utmost keenness of penetration and the deepest searching of curiosity. Nevertheless I would not that these adventures should become a common topic of conversation, inasmuch as they might be alluded to in my presence and cause me to experience a temporary confusion. If, then, you be really grateful for the pardon which I have accorded you, Eugene, and if you

How does it
Anno:
(I expect
Caroline's
pastimes

only entertain toward me one hundredth part of all those impassioned feelings which you ere now depicted so eloquently, you will swear to maintain an inviolable secrecy respecting the incidents of this night."

"I swear, beloved lady," exclaimed Lord Montgomery. "Besides, you have this guarantee, that I do not wish to forfeit Florimel's friendship, which I should assuredly do were he to discover the part that I have played toward you and which he little expected or intended his narrative to suggest. And now, dear lady, are you satisfied?"

"Yes, Eugene, perfectly," was the reply; "and thus do I convince thee of the sincerity of my word," she added, throwing herself into his arms and abandoning herself to his fervid caresses.

Almost immediately afterward the carriage stopped, and in an instant did the lady draw the hood of the domino over the earl's head and tie a silk handkerchief around it in such a manner that neither the night breeze nor any movement on his part could throw that cowl back.

The door of the vehicle was opened. The Circassian Slave descended first, and, guided by her hand, Lord Montgomery followed. Then ensued precisely the same circumstances which Lord Florimel had detailed in that particular portion of his narrative which referred to his own introduction to the lady's abode of love and mystery. For the Circassian Slave now led Earl Montgomery hastily forward; a gate closed behind them, on they went, and it struck him that they were threading the gravel walk of a garden or similar enclosure. In a couple of minutes they paused; the lady let go his hand for a moment, he heard a key turn in a lock, a door opened, his hand was again taken in a warm grasp that gave him a reassuring pressure, they entered some building, and once more did the lady pause to shut and fasten the door behind them. She then conducted him up a staircase so thickly carpeted that even the clumsiest boots and the heaviest footsteps must have passed noiselessly over it; and finally he was escorted along a passage into a chamber the atmosphere of which was warm and perfumed.

There must we leave the nobleman and his mysterious but enchanting companion for the present.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE MURDERESS AND HER ACCUSER

WHILE Pauline Clarendon and the Prince of Wales were brought into contact, on the one hand, and while Lord Montgomery was in the carriage with the unknown lady, on the other, an incident of a very different nature occurred on this night of multiform adventures.

Mrs. Brace was seated alone in her parlour, pondering upon many things, and from time to time cheering her spirits with some excellent Madeira, when Harriet suddenly made her appearance with a countenance as pale as death.

"What, in Heaven's name, is the matter?" inquired the milliner, starting from her seat and instantaneously catching the infection of her abigail's dismay.

"That dreadful man — who was here the other morning — and who would not give his name — but who looks like a constable," gasped Harriet, almost suffocated by the terror that was upon her.

"Ah! what can he possibly want?" murmured Mrs. Brace, in a dying tone; and a horrible sensation coming over her, she clung to the mantelpiece for support.

"My God! my God!" exclaimed Harriet, hysterically, and wringing her hands at the same time; "what shall we do?"

"For Heaven's sake, compose yourself," said the milliner, all in a moment, nerving herself with the courage of despair. "I know who he is: 'tis Mobbs, and he is accessible to bribery. Besides, if he has come alone, he means no mischief."

"Yes, he is alone," observed Harriet, catching eagerly at the hope which her mistress thus suddenly held out;

"and he spoke civilly enough when he asked to see you, ma'am."

"Then introduce him at once, and fear nothing," said Mrs. Brace, assuming a tone of firmness and assurance.

The lady's maid quitted the room; and during the few instants that the milliner remained alone, she exerted all the energy of her nature to tranquillize her feelings and compose her looks. For, in spite of the soothing words which she had spoken to Harriet, and with which she had even essayed to cheat herself into a belief of thorough security, a tremendous misgiving nevertheless lay like a weight of lead upon the guilty woman's soul. She felt a pain in the chest, a singular sensation, like that of collapse, in the stomach, and a tingling in all her limbs; and when she drew a long breath, it seemed as if she were struggling to throw some heavy load off her. These were the symptoms of her awful alarm, the tortures which conscience inflicted upon her; and despite the almost superhuman efforts which she made to conquer these feelings, it was in a horrible state of mind, though with a somewhat tranquillized countenance, that she met the looks of Mobbs as he appeared upon the threshold of her apartment.

The man was dressed in his drab greatcoat, wore his slouching hat, carried a short but thick stick in his hand, and was followed by the ugly mongrel dog which went about with him when he was not very particularly engaged. Altogether, he looked a much greater ruffian than nine-tenths of the London rogues and rascals who were wont to tremble at his name; and a glacial shudder passed through the milliner's entire form, penetrating even to the marrow of her bones, as she beheld his sinister eyes settling upon her with a frightful significancy.

And Mobbs saw how she quailed beneath his look and how her body writhed with the paroxysm of a profound and searching terror; and he said within himself, "The Gallows' Widow was right, and the milliner is a murderess."

"Walk in, Mr. Mobbs, and sit down," said the wretched woman, straining every nerve to seem composed, but enduring tortures so horrible that every instant appeared an age, and she felt as if she must either give vent to her excruciating sensations in a piercing scream or else be suffocated by the endeavour to subdue her emotions.

"How are you, ma'am?" said Mobbs, in his usual growling tone. "Come here, you ugly thief, will ye?" he cried, thus elegantly apostrophizing his dog, and bestowing a kick on the animal at the same time. Then, closing the parlour door, he advanced into the room and took a seat near the fire, saying, as he chucked his hat upon the carpet, "It's a cold night, ma'am."

"Then you shall take something nice and warm, Mr. Mobbs, to comfort you," exclaimed the milliner, slightly gathering courage from the familiarity of his conduct; but as she placed the spirit bottles upon the table her hand shook visibly and her whole frame trembled with the same nervous agitation.

"Thank'ee, ma'am, I'll help myself to a drop of brandy," said Mobbs; and as he spoke he more than half-filled a tumbler with the potent spirit, adding a very moderate quantity of hot water and thrusting his dirty fingers into the sugar-basin to extract a couple of the largest lumps.

"And now what has brought you hither this evening, Mr. Mobbs?" inquired the milliner, affecting to be busily employed in snuffing the candles, in order that she might avert her countenance as she spoke. Then, although the words half-suffocated her to give utterance to them, she said, "Any tidings of your friend Mr. Grumley?"

"Well, not exactly, ma'am," returned Mobbs, exhaling that peculiar sigh of pleasure which with many persons follows a draught of some strong and agreeable beverage; "leastways, I can't say as yet."

"Ah! then you think you have obtained some clue respecting him?" cried Mrs. Brace, still keeping her countenance turned from Mobbs; for she felt that the agonies of her suspense might be read in the workings of her features.

"Well, to speak candidly, I think I have, ma'am," said Mobbs; and he emptied his tumbler.

"Won't you take some more? Pray help yourself, Mr. Mobbs," exclaimed the milliner, assuming her most winning tone; and, turning toward him, she threw her agitated looks upon his countenance.

"Thank'ee, ma'am, I'll help myself," he said, meeting her glance and observing that she recoiled from it with a shrinking that extended to her innermost being. "But you was asking me about Grumley, poor Peter Grumley,"

he continued, in his cold, implacable voice; "and I was telling you as how I had obtained, or fancied I'd obtained, a clue to him."

"And knowing that I felt interested in the matter, you kindly came to acquaint me with the circumstance, is it not so?" said the milliner, nerving herself with that desperate courage which seeks a relief from suspense even at the risk of learning the worst at once.

"Well, ma'am, I can't exactly say it was in such a humour that I called to-night," responded Mobbs, again fixing his eyes most suspiciously upon her; "for the truth is, and the truth may be as well told at once —"

"Oh, certainly," cried the woman, sinking upon a chair with a feeling as if her senses were abandoning her. "The truth —"

"Is that I have reasons to entertain suspicions, ma'am," continued Mobbs, leaning forward as he spoke.

"Ah! suspicions — is it possible?" murmured Mrs. Brace, in a dying tone.

"Yes, suspicions of the strongest nature," proceeded Mobbs, his tone and looks every instant becoming more ominous.

"Against whom?" gasped the milliner, as if her very life depended upon the answer.

"Against you!" was the terrific response.

A strong spasm shook the wretched woman from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet, and the natural colour quitting her cheeks and leaving the rouge upon the marble flesh rendered her positively ghastly. Her livid lips moved quiveringly with the vain attempt to articulate a few words; her voice remained, as it were, in her throat, held back by an irresistible weight and accompanied by a suffocating sensation. Frozen with dread horror, struck motionless by a tremendous consternation, she sat gazing with haggard eyes upon that ill-looking countenance which was opposite to her, and on which she read an expression of mingled malignity and fiendish cunning.

Ineffable was the anguish endured by the milliner for upwards of a minute. Whole ages of excruciating torture seemed to be condensed into that space. Though awfully aware of the necessity of saying something in reply to the terrific accusation made against her, she could not give utter-

ance to a word; and though equally alive to the appalling fact that her looks were confirming all the man's suspicions, she was utterly unable to compose her features or even assume the most distant semblance of outraged innocence.

A far less intelligent man than Mobbs would have read guilt written on her features, proclaimed by her looks, and apparent in her manner, as plainly as if the word were stamped with a searing-iron upon her brow. He was accordingly convinced, beyond all possibility of doubt, that the Gallows' Widow had placed him upon the right scent; but he did not wish to act with a precipitation that should lead to an immediate explosion. Indeed, it formed no part of his plan to urge matters to an exposure at all; and therefore he did not contemplate extreme measures with regard to the unhappy woman. He knew that she was rich; and it had been already settled between himself, the Gallows' Widow, and Carrotty Poll that the knowledge of Mrs. Brace's tremendous secret should be made the means of extorting considerable sums of money from her. This was a game which suited Mr. Mobbs much better than getting himself restored to office by giving publicity to the murder and thereby explaining the real cause of Grumley's disappearance. Therefore, what he now aimed at was to penetrate into the very depths of the milliner's secret and ascertain how she had disposed of the corpse of her victim, so that he might get her completely into his power and make her purse a constant source of supply for his own behoof by holding her crime in terror over her head.

Such were the man's calculations; and accordingly, when he had suffered her to endure all the poignancy of that alarm which was certain to render her as docile and submissive as his purposes required, he said, in a tone through which he only suffered his meaning to penetrate dimly and ambiguously, "You see, ma'am, that it's of no use to deny the thing, and therefore you'd better make a friend of me."

The milliner started as if from a hideous dream. For her imagination, so intensely tortured, had pictured nothing less than the very worst, — her immediate arrest, a full exposure, the horrors of Newgate, and all the consecutive details usually resulting from the discovery of so heinous a crime. But in the words which suddenly broke upon her ears through this awful vision, she beheld a gleam of hope; and

instantaneously catching at it with the feverish haste of desperation, even though it should prove only a straw, she said, "What mean you? Explain yourself. How can you serve me as a friend?"

"By not becoming your enemy, to be sure," was the immediate response. "As matters now stand, it is in my power to give you into custody on suspicion of having made away with Peter Grumley."

"But you will not do so, Mr. Mobbs? You will not ruin me?" murmured the wretched woman, the words escaping through the chattering of her teeth, and her voice trembling as fearfully as her body.

"Well, ma'am, it would be a pity to send such a handsome creatur' to the scaffold," said the man, coolly.

"O God! do not allude to such a horror," cried Mrs. Brace, in an almost shrieking tone; and, falling upon her knees at his feet, the elegant milliner humbled herself like the veriest mendicant to that ill-looking, vulgar, gross-minded ruffian who was himself an assassin, yes, the assassin of his wife and his children.

"Come, get up, ma'am, get up," he said. "It will be your own fault if I hurt you. I'm sure I don't want to make a disturbance about this business, although it's a very orkard one."

"Is it possible to hush it up? Can money purchase your silence?" inquired the milliner, with an hysterical rapidity of tone, as she sprang from her knees and joined her hands imploringly.

"Well, I dare say we shall be able to come to an understanding, my dear madam," said Mobbs, whose familiarity, which at any other time would have been odious and disgusting to a degree, was now welcomed as a proof of good feeling. "But before we touch on that part of the business, I must know everything."

"Everything?" repeated Mrs. Brace, now wondering, for the first time, how much he did already know and whence that knowledge was gleaned; and at the same time it struck her that if she had denied the accusation at the very outset and acted with a fortitude proper to the emergency, she would not now be in the power of an unprincipled villain.

"Yes, you must tell me everything," repeated Mobbs,

with a savage emphasis; for he understood all the thoughts that had just traversed her mind. "And you need not fancy that you can baffle me."

"Oh, no, no, I do not entertain such an idea," said the wretched woman, now perceiving that it was too late to assume the air of innocence and the tone of bravado. "I am at your mercy, and you can deal with me as you choose."

"That's talking more sensible," observed Mobbs. "And now, ma'am," he said, abruptly rising from his seat, "you'll be so kind as to show me where you've deposited the dead body of my poor friend."

"Ah! you wish to ruin me, you mean to expose me," cried the miserable Mrs. Brace, an ice-chill striking to her very heart's core. "My God! my God!" she exclaimed, in a frenzied tone, and pressing both her hands to her throbbing brows; "what will become of me?"

"You will ruin and expose yourself if you go on in this manner," said Mobbs, brutally. "Do you want to alarm the whole house? I tell you that I will befriend you if you do as I dictate; but if not —"

"My God! I will not irritate you any more. I will be obedient, passive, docile," murmured the unhappy woman, her teeth chattering with the intense chill of the tremor that was upon her, although the atmosphere of the room was agreeably warm. "What do you require, Mr. Mobbs? Speak, I am at your orders."

"It is now half-past eleven o'clock," said the man, glancing toward the timepiece on the mantel, "and I suppose all your people are pretty well in bed, or soon will be. It won't, therefore, be causing any suspicion if you'll just quietly take a candle in your hand and show me where my poor friend's body is hid. I don't want to know for any reason prejudicial to you, but merely for satisfaction's sake."

"And you will not use the evidence against me? You will not destroy me?" asked Mrs. Brace, still shuddering visibly.

"If I wanted to do you a mischief, I have sufficient grounds on which to act, as matters now stand," replied Mobbs, "and if I had meant it from the very first, I should have arrested you at once. Now do you understand, and will you be satisfied?"

"Yes, yes, I am satisfied," said the miserable woman.

"Then make haste, take the candle, and do as I bid you," returned Mobbs.

"But if any of my servants should be below?" said Mrs. Brace, in nervous alarm.

"Ah! it's below, is it?" muttered Mobbs. "Well," he exclaimed, "go and get your people out of the way, and I'll take a drop more brandy during your absence."

This permission to quit his company and go about as she liked, unwatched and unattended, did more in a single instant to revive Mrs. Brace's courage and inspire her with confidence than all the man's oaths, promises, and protestations of secrecy, silence, and friendship could have done in an hour. A gleam of animation even came back to her countenance and a faint smile appeared upon her lips, so immense was the relief she thus suddenly experienced.

Issuing from the parlour, she descended to the servants' hall, where she found Frederick Dray and Harriet in earnest conversation together, the other domestics having retired to rest.

The handsome footman and the pretty lady's-maid were evidently in a state of much uneasiness and alarm; and they were wondering together what could possibly keep Mr. Mobbs so long with their mistress, when this lady herself entered the servants' hall.

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed Harriet, running toward her, "we are so terribly frightened. What does he want, and is he gone?"

"No, he is not gone," hastily responded Mrs. Brace; "but you have nothing to fear."

"God be thanked!" murmured Harriet, almost fainting with the sudden rebound that her heart gave when thus released from the appalling suspense that had previously held every chord tightened to the extremest tension.

"No, you have nothing to fear," resumed the milliner, in the same quick and excited tone as before; "nevertheless, he knows all — everything."

"Perdition!" ejaculated Frederick Dray.

"O God!" murmured Harriet, now sinking helplessly upon a chair.

"Yes, he knows everything," continued Mrs. Brace; "but he will not betray us, he will accept a bribe, he will

befriend us, and he insists upon my showing him the spot where the body is buried."

"Ah! then he means treachery of some kind, either for now or hereafter," said Frederick Dray; "but I will forestall him," he added, his countenance suddenly expressing a terrible resolution.

"What mean you, my good fellow?" demanded Mrs. Brace, in a whispering tone; but the sinister light which all on a sudden flamed up in her eyes, the ominous contraction of her brow, and the nervous trepidation which shook her entire form showed plainly enough that she already understood Frederick Dray full well.

"You know what I mean, ma'am," he said, his voice becoming low and thick; and, having glanced toward Harriet to assure himself that she did not overhear what was now passing, he fixed his eyes with a bold intelligence upon the countenance of his mistress.

"Yes, I do understand you, Frederick," she murmured. "But, my God! is it necessary — this additional crime?"

"It is necessary," answered Dray. "Bring the villain down into the back kitchen, tell him what tale you will, and as he returns — mind, as he returns, I say — I shall spring upon him from the pantry. But you must hasten back to him, for fear he should suspect a plant, and in the meantime I will get that girl up to her own room," he added, pointing to Harriet, who was sitting, or rather lying back half-fainting in an armchair.

"Be it all as you say, Frederick," observed Mrs. Brace; and she turned hastily away, in order to avoid meeting his looks once more, for it seemed as if there were murder in them.

But during the minute she took to retrace her way to the parlour, Mrs. Brace appeared to obtain a wonderful familiarity with crime, as if by the sudden inspiration of Satan; and ceasing almost instantaneously to look with horror upon another murder, she was led to contemplate it as a necessity, and then to rejoice at the idea as a means of ensuring her safety in future.

In this last-mentioned state of mind was it that she once more stood in the presence of Mobbs, who was just emptying his tumbler as she opened the door.

"Well, is all quiet below?" he demanded, significantly.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Brace. "Two of the domestics were sitting up, but I sent them to their respective chambers. You may come now, Mr. Mobbs, if you please."

"Lead the way, ma'am, and I'll follow," said the ex-constable. "Come, Toby, you ugly blackguard."

These last words were addressed to his dog, which kept close at his master's heels, as the master himself followed Mrs. Brace, who carried a candle in her hand.

Down to the lower regions of the spacious dwelling they descended; and on reaching the bottom of the stairs, Mrs. Brace paused for a moment, under pretext of trimming with a pin the flaring wick of the candle, but really to subdue the sudden feeling of horror which sprang up in her mind as she felt that she was now standing, as it were, upon the threshold of a new crime. For from the short passage leading to the back kitchen did the pantry open on the right hand, and the woman knew that Frederick Dray was concealed there with a murderous intent.

"Be quiet, Toby," exclaimed Mobbs, in a savage tone to the dog, which was beginning to give vent to a low and peculiar growl, in which there was also something plaintive, as if the animal's instinct were already receiving some strange and mysterious attraction toward the spot where murder's dire work was concealed. "Come along, ma'am," said the ex-constable, turning toward Mrs. Brace; "for if you don't act as a guide, this beast will."

The milliner shuddered with a profound sensation of horror; for it seemed to her as if the very instinct of animals were sublimated to the degree of refinement necessary to espy, accuse, and expose the perpetrator of the foul crime of murder.

But, gathering all the remains of that moral energy which had been so terribly shaken within the last hour, Mrs. Brace led the way along the passage; and it was a respite to this miserable woman to reflect that the new crime was not to be perpetrated until she and Mobbs should be retracing their way back from the spot where the murdered victim lay. Thus, even while she had hardened her soul to contemplate the death of her companion as an imperious necessity, she nevertheless experienced an immense relief in the postponement of the fatal instant even for a few minutes.

The passage was threaded; she strained her ears, oh, how

tensely she strained them, to catch a sound, the slightest, that might assure her whether Frederick Dray was in the pantry or not; but all was still in that direction.

She now threw open the door of the back kitchen; but so hideous a sensation of terror once more seized upon her as her eyes fell on the stone that covered the unblessed grave of the corpse, that she staggered on the threshold and leaned against the door-post for support.

"Ah! I understand," muttered Mobbs, in a tone which would have been inaudible under any less momentous circumstances, but which was as easily heard as the roar of a cannon now that every one of the wretched woman's senses was strung to the extremest tension.

"My God! my God!" she murmured, her teeth chattering and her knees knocking together.

"Come, ma'am, don't take on like this," said Mobbs, gradually divesting himself of his wonted brutality of manner in proportion as he found her getting deeper and deeper into his power. "The thing's done and can't be helped now. So we must make the best of it."

What Mr. Mobbs meant by making the best of a murder, we must leave our readers to judge for themselves. Certain, however, it was that the remark carried a sort of philosophical, or rather desperate consolation to the mind of Mrs. Brace, and she said, in a tone of reviving assurance, "You speak truly enough, Heaven knows, Mr. Mobbs. But would to God that it had never happened!" she added, with the most unfeigned, the most heartfelt sincerity.

"There, ma'am, you see it's just as I told you," observed the ex-constable, pointing toward the dog, who was smelling around the very identical stone and giving vent at the same time to a low and hideous sound which can only be described as a subdued moaning howl; "that there animal is as sagacious as a Christian, and I needn't ask where my partner has been buried."

Mrs. Brace was about to remind the ex-constable, for the tenth time, of his promise not to betray her, when she suddenly remembered that the reiteration of the pledge on his part was unnecessary, inasmuch as Frederick Dray was no doubt lying in ambush to silence his lips for ever; and now that she had conquered the first feeling of terror and consternation on revisiting the spot where her victim

lay buried, she derived a sudden and strange hardihood from the thought that a second crime was about to render the first one as safe as it could possibly be made.

But scarcely had this reflection braced her mind with that unnatural courage, scarcely, too, had Mobbs entered the back kitchen and begun to gaze upon the stone beneath which his murdered superior lay, when they were both startled by piercing screams which appeared to come from above and penetrate through the floor and wall and chamber after chamber, down unto that lowest region of the milliner's establishment.

For a few moments Mobbs paused and listened with breathless attention, as if all his thoughts were in an instant diverted from the murder to this new and suddenly transpiring subject of interest; then, as the shrieks continued in louder waves of thrilling, rending, agonizing sound, he yielded to the impulse of his own instincts, and, forgetting that he was no longer a constable nor bound to take notice of any such occurrence, he snatched the candle from Mrs. Brace's hand and darted away like one demented, with the dog at his heels.

So sudden was this movement on his part that the rush which he made along the passage struck a panic to the heart and paralyzed the arm of Frederick Dray, who had been holding himself in readiness to spring forth from the pantry; and the club which he had provided for his murderous purpose fell from his grasp.

As for Mrs. Brace, she stood petrified and stricken dumb for a moment, inasmuch as she suspected only too well whence those rending shrieks emanated, and she was transfixed by the idea of such a ruffian as Mobbs interfering in the matter; but almost at the very next instant the appalling, maddening, horrifying reminiscence shot through her brain that she was now alone in the sepulchre of her murdered victim, and, as the light was rapidly disappearing, she rushed forth from the back kitchen with a shriek of mortal agony.

At the same moment Frederick Dray, having recovered his presence of mind, emerged from the pantry; and the wretched woman, sinking beneath the weight of accumulating misfortunes, threw herself into his arms and fainted. The next instant the light disappeared and total darkness

prevailed in that place; for Mobbs had already gained the top of the staircase leading to the ground floor, and he had taken the candle with him.

The shrieks continued; he paused for a moment to listen, and his quick ear informed him that they came from premises behind those where he now was. A passage leading in that direction met his view, and he rushed along it, shading the light with his hand in order to protect it from the current of air which his rapid progress created. A door barred his way, but it opened to his touch; and, entering another passage, he instantaneously perceived that he had thus forced his way into the house which was at the back of Mrs. Brace's, but the front of which he knew must look upon St. James's Square. The discovery that the two dwellings thus communicated excited his curiosity, thereby forming an additional impulse to urge him on. At the end of this second passage a door opened into a hall lighted by a lamp, and where a footman was seated in a lounging posture, his whole aspect and manner denoting the most supreme indifference to the sounds of anguish which still came with piercing note from above.

"Holloa! who are you, and what the devil do you want?" cried the footman, now starting to his feet as Mobbs rushed into the hall, followed by his dog.

"Don't you hear that row, you cursed sleepy fool?" demanded the ex-constable, savagely; and, without pausing to hear the flunkey's reply, he sprang up the handsomely carpeted and well-lighted staircase, the mongrel keeping close at his heels.

Suddenly the shrieking ceased, but not before the keen and experienced ear of Mobbs had caught the direction whence it came; and, guided by that clue, he unhesitatingly burst open the door facing the head of the staircase.

"Damnation! what means this intrusion?" demanded a fine, tall, portly man dressed in a Turkish costume, and who held in his arms the senseless form of a lovely creature attired in the picturesque garb of a Flower Girl.

"Why, that rape and ravishment and all kinds of things are going on here," said Mobbs; "and it's my dooty to perwent them," he added, still forgetting that he was no longer a peace-officer, but obeying the impulse of those habits which had become second nature.

Then, as he thus spoke, he flung aside the candle which he had brought with him, and, seizing the Prince of Wales with his right hand, he swung him completely around, while with his left arm he tore the senseless Pauline from the royal voluptuary's embrace.

At the same moment the dog, naturally regarding the prince as some enemy of his master's and therefore deeming it right and proper to take a due share in the proceedings, flew at the royal legs and began snapping and barking in a most disrespectful manner at the heels and ankles of the heir apparent to the British throne.

"Call off your cur, you damned rascal!" cried the prince, exasperated almost to madness, as he danced about to avoid the teeth of the annoying mongrel. "Do you hear me, sir? Call off your dog! By the living God — But perhaps you do not know who I am?"

"Some swell-mob scoundrel dressed up in masquerade togger," said Mobbs, who at that moment was conveying Pauline Clarendon to a sofa, the disturbance having startled her from the deep swoon into which she had fallen.

But springing to her feet, the beauteous maiden threw a rapid glance around; and finding herself freed from the odious embraces of her royal tormentor, she paused not to reflect how she had been delivered nor even to thank her deliverer; but, obedient to the impulse of the terrors consequent on the startling manner in which she had been awakened, she darted from the room.

"Stop her! stop her, I command you!" cried the Prince of Wales, no longer able to control either his words or his actions, and he rushed after the flying damsel.

"At him, Toby!" ejaculated Mobbs; and in a moment the teeth of the dog were fixed in the heir apparent's right leg.

And the heir apparent, oh, crowning ignominy, roared most lustily, while Pauline Clarendon, snatching up her cloak on the landing, bounded along, descended the stairs half a dozen at a time, and, opening the front door, rushed from the house. For the hall was empty, the footman whom Mobbs had encountered there having hastened into the other house to alarm Mrs. Brace with the intelligence that a rough-looking fellow with a mongrel dog had invaded the sanctity of that portion of the establishment which was devoted to "fashionable accommodation."

In the meantime Mobbs had called off his dog; and the Prince of Wales, throwing himself exhausted and bleeding upon a sofa, was about to overwhelm the ex-constable with the astounding revelation of his name and rank, when even through the turmoil of his enraged feelings flashed (like lightning through the stormiest clouds) the conviction that he would only be covering himself with ridicule and enhancing his humiliation to the extremest verge were he to inform that sordid-looking, coarse, and ungainly ruffian who he really was.

"Ah! it's all very well to lie there kicking up that infernal row," said Mobbs, who, although he had seen the Prince of Wales more than once in his life, did not recognize him in the masquerading garb; "but you've nobody to thank for all this but yourself. What the devil! are the king's lieges to be raped and ravished by such disguised mahogany-jumpers as you, in spite of their cries and screams? I shouldn't be doing my dooty as a Bow Street runner —"

And then Mr. Mobbs suddenly stopped short; for the remembrance flashed to his mind that he was no longer in the service of the peace.

"Ah! you're an officer, are you?" said his Royal Highness, who, despite the bitter annoyance which he felt and the pain which his lacerated leg was causing him, nevertheless perceived the imperious necessity of extricating himself as promptly and also as quietly as he could from the present dilemma. "Well, I dare say you know what it is to let a gentleman escape out of a difficulty by means of a golden key; and as the girl has come to no harm, it would be useless for you to carry the matter any further. There, take those ten guineas and be off. You've done me quite mischief enough already, or rather your dog has," added the prince, with a suppressed moan, as he tied his handkerchief around the wounded limb.

"Well, sir, I'm sure I don't want to make things more uncomfortable than they are at present," said Mobbs, picking up with ill-concealed satisfaction the gold pieces which his Royal Highness threw down upon a table. "But you must know that if gentlemen like you will get into scrapes, they stand the chance of bringing the law about their ears."

"I paid you to take your departure, and not to remain

here lecturing me," said the prince, with all the dignified hauteur that was natural to him. "But stay, one moment," he cried, a sudden idea striking him; "how came you to burst into this room, or rather, how was it that you were in the house at all?"

"I'd better leave it to this good lady to explain to you, sir," remarked Mobbs, pointing toward Mrs. Brace, who at the moment hurried into the room, followed by Frederick Dray and the other footman.

"Hush!" said the prince, placing his finger upon his lips to warn the milliner not to utter a word which might make known his rank to Mobbs; for he saw by the agitation and dismay which her entire appearance exhibited that it was more than probable she might blurt forth something calculated to betray his incognito.

"I will call again to-morrow night. In the meantime you've nothing to fear, ma'am," hastily whispered the ex-constable as he passed by the milliner; and, calling his dog to follow him, he took his departure, well pleased with the result of the adventure and chinking the gold in his pocket.

"You may retire," said the milliner to Frederick Dray and the other footman. Then, the moment they had left the room, she turned toward the prince, exclaiming, "My God! what has happened? But it was not my fault; you cannot blame me — Oh, I am going mad — mad!"

And flinging herself upon a chair, she pressed her hands to her throbbing brows, as if she could thereby steady her reason which she felt to be rocking upon its throne.

"What in the devil's name is the matter with you?" demanded the prince, who was glad to find a vent for his execrable ill-humour, even though it were against a poor defenceless woman, and that woman the pander to his vile pleasures. "Did that Bow Street runner come to make inquiries concerning the Magsman your husband, or how was it that such an ill-looking ruffian came to be in the house at this time of night?"

"Mr. Harley — your Royal Highness, this is cruel, ungenerous, unkind to a degree," sobbed the wretched milliner. "I — I — do not deserve — such — such — treatment at your hands," and then she burst into a flood of tears.

"Come, Fanny, this is stupid," said the prince, somewhat

mollified by her grief. "I spoke hastily — and unkindly, I will admit; but when one has been interrupted just at the moment of success with a lovely creature, then subjected to the brutal insults of a low ruffian, next bitten in the leg by an accursed dog that may be mad, for anything I know to the contrary —"

"Bitten — by a dog!" screamed Mrs. Brace, starting to her feet and surveying the prince with dismay. "Oh, is this possible?"

"Quite possible, inasmuch as it has happened," said the heir apparent, pointing to the bandage on his leg. "But I will hasten home and get Doctor Somers to look to it at once. Relieve me from suspense, however, before I take my departure, and tell me how that man came to burst into the room; for surely the girl's screams could not have been heard in St. James's Square?"

"No, no," responded the milliner, hastily. "The officer came on a little business of his own — to — to — in fine, to receive some money for the affair of Caroline Walters; and being in the other house, he heard the shrieks —"

"Enough, enough," exclaimed the prince. "I am satisfied now. He did not recognize me, and I gave him ten guineas to go away quietly. But I was fearful that if the girl's screams had been heard outside, a crowd might have collected. Your explanation has, however, put my mind at rest on that head. And now, my dear Fanny, forgive me for what I said just now, and don't think the worse of your old friend on account of a passing petulance on his part. Come, one kiss, and then I will take my departure."

But as the milliner raised her countenance toward the prince, he perceived that it was haggard and had a ghastly look; and fixing his eyes more intently upon her, he saw that the traces of profound horror and bitter grief were upon every lineament, despite her endeavours to assume a composed aspect.

"What, in the name of Heaven, is the matter with you?" inquired the prince, somewhat alarmed, inasmuch as there were so many of his own little affairs mixed up with those of Mrs. Brace that he did not know how far her present cause of annoyance might affect himself. "Tell me, Fanny, what is the matter with you?" he repeated, more emphatically still.

"Nothing, nothing, I can assure you," she answered. "Only the events of the last few days, — Rose Foster's affair, that of Caroline Walters, and now the alarm of this night, all these have unstrung my nerves."

"Well, you must take courage and console yourself," said the prince, not for an instant suspecting that anything more serious than the circumstances she had enumerated was preying upon her mind. "And now good night. I myself am infernally vexed at the issue of the adventure with Pauline Clarendon."

"Pauline Clarendon!" ejaculated Mrs. Brace, forgetting for a moment all the causes of her own affliction in the amazement with which the prince's words had filled her.

"Well, since I inadvertently let the name escape me," he observed, with a smile, "I shall not attempt to conceal the truth. Besides, I may require your assistance in the matter."

"And that was Pauline Clarendon whom you brought hither just now?" remarked the milliner, still under the influence of a profound and somewhat painful surprise. "What, is it possible that the amour with her unfortunate sister did not cause both you and me sufficient alarm —"

"My dear Fanny," interrupted the prince, in a resolute tone, "it is useless to remonstrate. When I came in so hurried a manner to you just now and told you that I had seen the loveliest figure in the whole world at the masquerade, and that Germain was about to bring the unknown hither, I declared that I was already maddened by the elegance, grace, and virgin freshness of that transcendent form. I was then utterly ignorant who the Flower Girl could be; but when she revealed her countenance in this room, oh, then never did Pauline appear so ravishingly beautiful. A thousand charms on no former occasion observed by me were instantaneously discovered, and she struck me as being more lovely than Octavia. Think you, then, that I will abandon the hope of this conquest? Think you that I will renounce my pursuit of her? No, no, a hundred thousand times no. And it was also because she was haughty and reproachful, because she looked daggers at me with her magnificent eyes, and because she darted forth galling arrows in the shape of words from between the parting roses of her lips, ay, it is also on this account that I

will wage war against her stubborn virtue, so that my vengeance and my bliss shall be crowned with triumph at the same moment. Seek not therefore to turn me from my purpose; but, on the contrary, prepare to lend me your aid when I may require it. And now once more good night."

Thus speaking, the prince quitted the room; and muffling himself up in an ample cloak, he returned on foot to Carlton House.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE BOUDOIR OF LOVE AND MYSTERY

WE must now return to Lord Montgomery and the Circassian Slave, whom we left at the moment when the latter introduced the former into a chamber the atmosphere of which was warm and perfumed.

Quitting her hold upon the nobleman's hand, his fair companion locked the door, and he heard her take out the key, which she deposited somewhere in the room. She then bade him remove the handkerchief from around his head and throw off his mask and domino; and when he had done this, he found, as of course he had expected, that the chamber was involved in the most pitchy darkness.

That this was the same room of which Lord Florimel had spoken, Montgomery felt convinced the instant that he set foot in it, for the approaches to it were precisely the same as detailed at the close of the forty-second chapter; and he speedily found that not only was it furnished in a most luxurious manner, but that certain articles of furniture were precisely the same as his noble friend had represented. That is to say, the table stood between the sofa and the bed; and near the head of the bed there was a large armchair.

"Seat yourself by my side, dear Eugene," said the lady, in the most tender cadence of her melting and musical voice, taking his hand, at the same time, and thus bringing him close to her upon the sofa. Then throwing her arms about his neck, she drew him toward her and their lips met again in a long, burning kiss.

"Dearest, dearest lady," exclaimed the nobleman, a flood of rapture pouring in unto his soul, "what earthly happiness can compare with this?"

And then, as one arm clasped her supple, yielding, and

luxurious form, he passed his right hand caressingly over her countenance, and he could tell by the touch that her features were beautifully formed, while her cheeks were of velvet softness in one sense and plump and firm in another. Her breath was as fragrant as the zephyr which passes over the sweetest flowers; and he had already observed beneath her mask, when in the theatre, that her teeth were white as pearls and faultlessly even.

"Now, tell me candidly, my dear Eugene," she observed, as her head reposed upon his shoulder, "tell me what you think of the woman who could so far forget herself as to become the heroine of such an adventure as this whereof you yourself are the hero."

"I was about to reply, my charming friend," said Montgomery, "that the intoxication of the happiness which I experience leaves no leisure for reflection, and indeed that I have no wish to think of anything save the ineffable delight which I enjoy in your society. But your question has forced the subject upon my thoughts; and I will candidly declare that I consider you to be wise in following the dictates of your feelings and the impulse of your tenderest passions in strewing the rugged paths of this world with as many flowers as possible. You are formed for love and pleasure. Oh, yes, your nature and your person are alike glowing with raptures, to experience and to impart them. And I love you, I swear by everything sacred that I love you, and perhaps all the more fervently, all the more madly, because of this mystery with which you envelop yourself and which constitutes an additional charm."

"You love me, you love me," murmured the impassioned woman, yielding herself unresistingly to the caresses which the nobleman lavished upon her and courting the voluptuous toyings in which he indulged; "but of what nature is this love, Eugene? Oh, do not deceive me, but confess that it is the mere excitement of the imagination and the passions, an excitement that will leave no durable sentiment behind."

"On the contrary, my dearest unknown," exclaimed Montgomery, speaking with fervour and straining her passionately in his embrace, "I shall never, never forget these moments of love so ineffably delicious and so truly Elysian. Ah! if there were a light in this chamber, you could tell by my eyes, by my whole countenance, that I am

speaking the truth; but even in the midst of this darkness mayst thou obtain a proof of the strength of those emotions which I feel. There, place your hand upon my heart; does it not palpitate with the flutterings of a tenderness which is not altogether sensual? And even now, with the full enjoyment of bliss within my reach, do I prefer reclining with you for a time in this manner, my arm around your waist, your head upon my shoulder, your breath fanning my cheek, your bosom heaving against my chest, and your voice flowing in the sweetest melody upon my ears. Yes, there is sentiment in all this; and where there is sentiment, something more permanent than a mere gross passion hath assuredly an existence. Again, it would be pouring gall into the cup of ambrosia of which I am now drinking such deep draughts were you to tell me that this is the last time as well as the first that I am ever to enjoy so much happiness. I shall know not a greater joy than that of meeting you again; I could know not a greater misery than that of being separated from you for ever. Now, then, adored lady, tell me whether you think I love you?"

"Yes, I believe that you experience an interest in me, Eugene," said the unknown, interrupting herself at every word to bestow upon him the tenderest kisses; "and I at once promise you that we shall meet again."

"Thanks, ten thousand thanks, sweet lady, for this assurance," cried the earl, in unfeigned rapture. "But you will not allow too long an interval to elapse —"

"No," was the soft response; "for I myself shall be only too happy to renew the pleasures of this meeting."

"Then you love me, dear lady, you love me?" exclaimed Montgomery, in a tone evincing the anxiety with which he awaited her answer.

"Yes, I love you, Eugene," said the mysterious unknown; "for I now find that you are as amiable and agreeable as you are grandly handsome. And at some future meeting," she continued, in a still lower and softer tone, as if her entire being were melting under the influence of her emotions, "at some future meeting it may be that I shall throw aside the mask of mystery and tell you who I am."

"Beloved friend," said the nobleman, "I care not who you may be, inasmuch as I adore you for yourself only, and whether you are a duchess or a humble gentlewoman, my

sentiments must ever remain the same. But there does exist a reason wherefore I should rejoice in the dissolution of the mystery which at present surrounds you, and that is because I should then behold with my eyes that countenance which I can only now contemplate with my imagination. On this account shall I hail with an indescribable ecstasy the moment when you may choose to place a full and complete confidence in me."

"And the arrival of that moment depends altogether upon yourself, Eugene," said the lady, one of her fair hands playing caressingly with his countenance.

"Upon myself!" he repeated. "Oh, explain the meaning of your words, my well-beloved, and teach me how I can merit your confidence."

"Listen to me, Eugene, and I will be candid with you," said the lady, in a tone of tender gravity. "The ardour of my temperament induces me to seek the pleasures of love in the manner which brought Lord Florimel to my arms, and which has this night thrown you and me together. I am unmarried, immensely rich, and entirely my own mistress. But you will ask wherefore I have not sought in marriage the legitimate gratification of my passions? In explanation I must inform you that I have ever held in abhorrence the idea of being chained to one individual; and, moreover, knowing the frailty of my nature, I should have shrunk from the bare thought of becoming the wife of an honourable and perhaps kind-hearted and confiding man, to whom it would have been impossible for me to remain constant. Under all these circumstances I preferred the adoption of that luxurious, free, and unshackled existence which was led by the celebrated Manon Lescaut of France, with this difference, however, that whereas she threw neither veil nor gloss over her amours, I have hitherto concealed mine beneath that impenetrable mystery which hides my name, rank, and even personal identity at this very moment from yourself. Well, for some years have I led this life; and yet my lovers have been comparatively few, and those all selected according to the passing whim of a moment. Now, however, I begin to grow weary of that existence, and I experience the necessity of having some one whom I may love and by whom I shall be beloved. I do not think of marriage, no, not a whit more now than I did

when first abandoning myself to this career of what may be termed mysterious voluptuousness. But I long to find a man who is handsome, elegant, and agreeable, and who possesses those honourable and delicate feelings that will render him silent as the tomb in respect to the real position in which he stands toward me. For the world believes me pure and virtuous, my name is untarnished, and my reputation is spotless as the mirror. To preserve this fair fame is naturally my object; and therefore the man who secretly becomes my lover must be one deserving the confidence reposed in him. For my honour — and in that word are also comprised my happiness and my very life — would be in his keeping; and before I can bring my mind to put so immense a trust in any human being, I must receive ample proofs of his worthiness. And here I will observe that so extraordinary are the precautions which I adopt to conceal my frailty from every eye, that not even the domestics who attended the carriage which brought you hither just now suspect for a moment the real purpose of your coming. I shall not reveal to you the tale which I invent on such occasions and which they implicitly believe. Suffice it to say that it is so feasible as to be convincing to them, and not a suspicion exists in their mind as to the purity of their mistress. Thus, my dear Eugene, you perceive that hitherto my amours have been conducted with a security and a safety which leave my reputation untainted; and I shall not lightly nor hastily break down a single one of all the defences and precautions with which I have surrounded my proceedings."

"And if I were to convince you, beloved lady," said Montgomery, who had listened in a strange kind of bewilderment to the singular avowals and explanations which were wafted to his ear in a voice of such melting softness, "if I were to convince you that I am worthy of your confidence, that I possess those feelings of honour and delicacy which you described —"

"In that case, my handsome Eugene," exclaimed the unknown, in a voice that trembled with ecstatic emotions, while her whole frame vibrated beneath the same influence as she lay embraced in his arms, "in that case, my handsome Eugene, you would only have to demand the revelation of my name and rank and to desire that the light of day should

shine upon my countenance in your presence, and you would be gratified. For I may say with truth that I bear a proud name, and without vanity that I am beautiful."

"But of what nature is the proof you require with regard to myself, dear lady?" asked Montgomery, his curiosity excited to an almost intolerable pitch.

"On that head, Eugene, I will give you some explanations," was the reply. "Know, then, that the man who would seek my confidence must begin by giving me his own; and to learn my secrets he must entrust me with all those which he cherishes in his own breast. He must unbosom himself entirely to me, even to the revelation of any little acts or deeds in his life on which he may look back with regret or shame. And if his earlier years have been sullied by any crime, so much the better for the purpose we are now discussing."

"I do not comprehend you, mysterious being that you are," exclaimed Lord Montgomery, a slight shudder passing through his frame.

"Oh, I will soon render myself intelligible, Eugene," she replied, mingling her words with caresses, as if she felt that he trembled and was anxious to reassure him. "For can you not understand that the individual who places himself, as it were, in my power, instantaneously and by virtue of that fact renders himself worthy to become the depositor of my secret? And therefore do I say that if he have committed some crime, it is all the better for such a purpose, inasmuch as if he confide his honour, his liberty, or his life to my keeping, I could not for a moment hesitate to entrust my reputation in his hands. A mutual necessity binds us to secrecy; and we have a reciprocal interest in shielding each other. For if the man whom I thus select as my lover has at any period of his life committed a deed which he would blush to avow or tremble to have made public, — be it swindling, rape, robbery, forgery, or even murder, — I should be all the more ready to trust him, and all the more confident in the safety of my secret. Nor should I love him the less; on the contrary, it would give me pleasure to soothe his wounded spirit, and even his remorse would recommend him the more closely to my affections, because I should rejoice in the fact that he was thus dependent upon me for solace and sympathy. If he were poor, or a spend-

thrift, I should likewise love him with the greater ardour, because I should feel that he was more completely mine, inasmuch as by placing the riches of my purse at his disposal I should ensure his gratitude and touch all the tenderest feelings of his nature. Now, therefore, my dear Eugene, you perceive that I am prepared to accept as a paramour a man whose name must be honourable, though his private life be sullied, a man who, like myself, can look the world in the face, but who dares not take a survey of his own soul. In a word, such a man must first place himself entirely in my power before I will consent to place myself in his; and he who will do this to prove his devotion not only gains my love for evermore, but may likewise enjoy the use of those superfluous thousands which I now bestow upon thankless relatives or equivocal public institutions."

"I have dwelt with an interest the most profound, dear lady, upon every word which has fallen from your lips," said the nobleman, bewildered by her language and intoxicated by the fond ardour of her caresses, "and I now comprehend you fully. But suppose that I was to tell you, while becoming a candidate for your permanent love, that I have never committed a deed the revelation of which would place me in your power, and that I am therefore unable to give you the guarantees which you require."

"Were you to tell me this much, Eugene," replied the lady, in a tone of prompt decision, "I should not believe you, and indeed you would at once destroy all the confidence which I might be previously disposed to place in you. Because there breathes not a man who has devoted himself to pleasure and who is known to be extravagant and even profligate, there breathes not such a man who can hold his head erect and proclaim himself sinless. No, it is impossible. And, moreover, were you to dare breathe such an assertion in my ears, it would take the aspect of an insult; forasmuch as it would be contrasting your own vaunted virtue with my frailty and shame."

"Dearest lady, I do not pretend to be immaculate," said the earl, lowering his voice to a whisper; "nay, more, I will even confess —"

"Ah! now you inspire me with an increasing confidence, Eugene, my handsome Eugene," exclaimed the impassioned unknown; and, fastening her lips to his mouth, she bestowed

upon him so long, luxurious, and burning a kiss that his form quivered with a perfect frenzy of ecstatic sensations, and he experienced all the delicious ebriety of the soul's thrilling raptures. "Yes, now I begin to adore you, my Eugene," continued the Circassian Slave, her bosom heaving and falling with voluptuous tumult against his chest; "and I will make you the god of my worship, the idol of my devotion, if you have only the courage to gain my confidence. Oh, I already feel that we are destined to arrive at a full and complete understanding with each other; and I now rejoice at the deception which you practised in order to take the place of your friend Florimel. For you, my Eugene, can appreciate the love and tenderness which I am prepared to bestow upon you, and which will place all I possess at your disposal. Yes, there is no sacrifice that I will not make for you, Eugene, in order to prove the strength, the ardour, the permanence of my attachment; and in return you will ever be as kind and amiable as you are now."

"Oh, every word you utter constitutes an irresistible temptation, siren that thou art," murmured the nobleman, now intoxicated with passion and maddened with desire to a degree which rendered him reckless of everything in the whole world save the charming object of his present enthusiasm. "Never did I become so completely a prey to the witching influence of woman as I now am; never was I so utterly enthralled by the magic of her voice, the tender persuasiveness of her tongue, and the ardour of her caresses. Oh, to behold your countenance, to look into the depth of those eyes which must be so beautiful, to gaze upon the expressive softness of those features which are faultless even to the touch as I pass my hand over them, to behold the flush of love and pleasure upon your cheeks, and to see that bosom's heaving which I now feel, oh, what sacrifice would I not make, what price would I not pay! Yes, even if it were placing my more than honour, my very existence, in your power, I should not hesitate."

"Then you do love me, Eugene, you love me, although you have not seen my face?" exclaimed the Circassian Slave, throwing fresh fervour, if possible, into her caresses and a more thrilling tenderness into her voice. "But I have already told you that I am beautiful, and it will be a proud moment for me when I can reveal my countenance to your

eyes. Oh, then, I shall not fear the result of the impression which will be made upon you; on the contrary, I have vanity enough to believe that you will bless the day that gave such a mistress to your arms. Moreover, — and you will excuse me for again touching upon such a subject at such a moment, — I know that your resources have been well-nigh absorbed by your love of pleasure and a ruinous lawsuit; and it will be my joy and delight to bring back smiles to your lips by placing some fifteen or twenty thousand pounds in your hands. Yes, I have that sum at my disposal at the present time; and it is yours, Eugene, yours, as a small token of my love, as a proof of my confidence, as an earnest of that compact of affection and of a secret understanding which must henceforth bind us to each other. And think not, my handsome Eugene, that I shall prove a jealous mistress, or that any ridiculous whims or despotic exactions on my part will instil the least drop of gall into the cup of pleasure which we are to quaff with each other. No, my whole study shall be to ensure your happiness; and if you choose to make some deserving woman the partner of your rank and fortune, I shall not regard her as a rival. Because I shall rest assured that you will still find a few occasional leisure moments to devote to one who has already conceived a sudden but not the less powerful affection for you, and who is disposed to make every sacrifice to ensure your felicity and retain your friendship until death."

There was something indescribably winning in the caresses that accompanied this persuasive appeal, which went searchingly to the innermost depths of the nobleman's heart; and there was likewise something so mysteriously romantic and yet so full of truth and sincerity in the language and the manner in which the impassioned woman offered her love and her riches for the acceptance of that man whose ardent temperament made him rejoice at the possession of the former and whose almost beggared purse caused him to snatch greedily at the latter, there was something so strange, so full of a magic charm, so profoundly touching in all this, that the strongest mind would have yielded and the most suspicious nature would have given way. The reader will not therefore be surprised if Lord Montgomery surrendered himself, soul and body, to the ineffable witchery of that

mysterious influence; and, anxious to behold the realization of all that the enamoured lady had shadowed forth in language alike so tender and so glowing, he folded her in an embrace full of enthusiastic feeling, exclaiming, "Oh, my adored unknown, let me at once prove myself worthy of your confidence. Let the delicious compact be sealed between us without another moment's delay."

"Tell me, then, my handsome Eugene, all that concerns you," said the Circassian Slave, overwhelming him with the tenderest kisses and the most voluptuous toyings. "Tell me the history of your life, unbosom every secret which your soul cherishes. Retrace your whole career, tremble not to expose its faults, shrink not from unveiling its deeper stains, if such there be. But act frankly and candidly toward me, make me your confidant and your friend, and all mystery shall then at once cease on my part."

"Yes, I will place myself in your power, dearest lady, irresistible charmer," said the earl, in a stifling tone. "Oh, if you were Satan in disguise, luring me to destruction, I could not combat against the influence which you have acquired over me. My God! how I long to know who you are, woman of wondrous witchery and romantic mysteriousness that thou still art to me! But since it now depends upon myself to dissolve that spell which renders you thus unknown and your countenance invisible, I will not delay the talismanic conjuration which is to lighten this strange darkness. Give me thine ear, then, my well-beloved, and prepare to listen to things, some of which will excite thy liveliest interest, and others make the blood curdle in thy veins."

"Oh, tell me all that, my adored Eugene, my worshipped lover," murmured the lady, pressing his hand passionately against her glowing bosom. "And think not that you will alarm or annoy me by any possible revelation which you can make; for I warn you that unless the promised confidence be so complete and in itself contain such facts as will place you thoroughly in my power, I shall not dare incur the risk of making myself known to you."

"God knows, thou siren," exclaimed Lord Montgomery, a rapid shudder passing over him, a shudder which she felt as she reclined in his arms, and which made her press even

more closely still to his breast, "God knows, thou siren, that I am about to place myself in thy power."

And then, as if to escape from the thoughts which had for an instant disturbed him with so harrowing an effect, and fall back again into that ecstasy of feeling which bathed his whole soul in a fount of voluptuousness, he imprinted innumerable kisses on the smooth brow, the glowing cheeks, and the moist, plump mouth of his companion; and then, yielding to the torrent of emotions which, alike delirious and delicious in their intoxicating influence, bore him on as if in an irresistible whirl of pleasure, he began to breathe his promised confessions in the ear of the lady.

And then, in the deep Stygian darkness of that chamber, but in an atmosphere warm and perfumed, with a splendid creature reclining in his arms, her whole form respiring soft and sensuous love, in this manner did the nobleman, no longer master of himself, but hurried on by a witching influence which he could not control, rendered insensate to and indifferent to all consequences save those which the siren herself had shadowed forth, abandoning himself therefore to the spell which was upon him, and full of a fervent hope and a blind confidence, in this manner was it, we say, that Lord Montgomery began to pour forth his revelations into the ears of the woman who had acquired so marvellous an ascendancy over him.

And she listened to the tale in the deepest silence, remaining almost motionless, too, in his arms the whole time, as if wrapped up in a breathless attention, save that now and then she pressed his hand with all the apparent ardour of the enthusiasm she had previously testified toward him; but when he paused, after having spoken for nearly a quarter of an hour in a low and murmuring though perfectly audible voice, she threw her arms around his neck, kissed him passionately, and exclaimed, in a voice full of joyous excitement, "Oh, I thank thee for this confidence, my ever dear, dear Eugene!"

"And you are not ashamed of the man who is henceforth to be thy lover, thy paramour, thy friend?" said the earl, his whole frame trembling with the ecstatic feelings which her ardour caused him to experience.

"Ashamed of you!" she repeated. "Oh, no, no, that were impossible. On the contrary, I adore you, I worship

you, my handsome Eugene. For now I perceive that all the licentiousness, all the voluptuous profligacy of my own career, render me a fitting companion for thee. Ashamed of you! Ah! should I not be also ashamed of myself, if I experienced such a feeling with regard to thee?"

"And yet you have heard all the cruelties I have practised toward the unhappy girls whom I have seduced at different times," said the nobleman; "how I have deserted them, suffered them to pine away in neglect, or perish in poverty."

"Every man of pleasure has done the same," observed the lady.

"Then, too," he continued, "you have heard all the meannesses which I have practised at different times to raise money, ay, and the crimes too that I have committed, such as fraud upon my bankers, forgery with my discounters, and all the routine of those acts which men so frequently practise when driven to desperation by their pecuniary necessities."

"Yes; but you have passed through the ordeal without detection," said the Circassian Slave; "and in the presence of the world your name is as untarnished and your reputation as unsullied as ever it was. Oh, all that you have told me yet amounts to comparatively nothing when we thus examine it in detail; and I still feel that my lascivious life stamps me with greater infamy than that which, so far as I am yet aware, could possibly attach itself to you. Proceed, therefore, my generous Eugene, my noble-hearted lover, and do not let me have to blush in your presence when I reveal my countenance. No, it is for you to prove yourself worse than I, and then away with the mystery that now surrounds me."

"Well, I will proceed, my angel; I will tell you more —"

"Not more, but all!" interrupted the lady, with passionate vehemence. "Come, delay not, time is passing."

"Oh, your anxiety to reach the end of this phase in our connection is not greater than mine, dearest unknown," exclaimed the earl. "I will therefore at once resume my confession by touching upon that lawsuit in which I am engaged against the Marchioness of Bellenden. Do you know that lady?"

"I have seen her, but we are not acquainted," was the

response; and the Circassian Slave pressed the nobleman's hand, as if to encourage him to proceed.

And he did proceed; and, in thus continuing his narrative, he spoke in a lower, deeper, and more solemn tone, as if his words were now things, and his language was conveying matters of the gravest import. And again, in utter silence and with a respiration almost entirely suspended, did the lady listen to the revealings which grew more astounding, more awe-inspiring as they progressed; until at last the nobleman breathed one fact, gave utterance to one circumstance which made her whole frame vibrate with a sudden tremor as she lay reclining in his arms. 'Twas as if a galvanic shock had been imparted all in a moment and unexpectedly; and the earl stopped short beneath the influence of a consternation which fell upon him with a similar abruptness.

"Ah! now you loathe, you abhor, you detest me," he exclaimed, in a wild tone; "and I have said too much."

"No, no, dearest Eugene, not a syllable too much," hastily cried the Circassian Slave, starting up and for the tenth time throwing her arms about his neck and folding him in a fervid embrace. "I rejoice, oh, I rejoice that you have done that deed, at least for one reason: because now I can look you without shame in the face, and, moreover, you have indeed placed yourself in my power. But such a noble confidence shall never, never be betrayed by me. On the contrary, I will cherish your secret as religiously as if it were mine own. And now you must give me all the details of that event, my Eugene, for it is invested with a thrilling and exciting interest."

And the insensate nobleman, once again abandoning himself to that ecstasy of feeling in which the wiles, the witchery, and the fascination of this extraordinary woman appeared to be able to plunge him at will, continued to breathe in her ear the explanatory details which she sought, and to the narration of which she encouraged him by the tenderest caresses.

At length he ceased speaking, and every incident of his life was now made known to her.

"You have told me all, Eugene, you have told me all," she murmured, as, seated upon his knees, with her arms around his neck, she lavished upon him such kisses that the

very air of that dark chamber seemed filled with their fervour. "You have told me all, and I thank you, oh, I thank you, from the bottom of my soul. But now let us seek the couch of love, and when the morning dawns, the sunbeams shall shine upon my countenance. Then will I reveal to you my name, and all the first conditions of our compact will be fulfilled."

"Be it as you say, adorable woman," exclaimed the earl, maddened with desire; and he covered her face with devouring kisses.

"Stay, we must seal our compact with wine as well as with love," said the lady, as if inspired with the sudden thought of enhancing the thrill of sensual longing by the influence of the generous grape; and reaching toward the table, but without quitting her position upon his knees, she felt with her fair hands for what she sought.

In a few moments the sharp sound of an exploding cork, followed by the hissing of effervescent wine, and by the exhalation of a delicious aroma, made Lord Montgomery aware that it was in champagne the compact was to be ratified; and immediately afterward he felt a glass raised to his lips.

"I pledge thee, my Eugene," said the lady, "in the generous juice of Epernay, and long may the bond of our affection endure."

"I pledge thee in return, my adorable unknown," exclaimed Montgomery, "and may death alone be enabled to quench the flame of that passion which we now cherish for each other."

Having thus spoken, he drained the glass; but as he withdrew it from his lips, it fell from his hands, and a mortal terror suddenly seized upon him as he experienced a sensation of giddiness fasten on his brain, as it were, all in an instant. A cry of alarm escaped him, and the lady sprang from her seat upon his knees, her musical tones now sounding in a laugh of triumph. He endeavoured to raise himself from the sofa; but his limbs were heavy as lead, insensibility gained upon him, all his ideas fell suddenly into confusion, he heard nothing more, he felt nothing more, and the scene of mystery and love and romance terminated all in a moment in an utter blank.

When Lord Montgomery awoke again to consciousness, the light was streaming in upon him from the window facing the couch in which he was lying. He rubbed his eyes and looked around. Where was he? Why, assuredly in his own chamber in Grafton Street, in his own bed!

Then was it all a dream? Were all those circumstances which now came slowly back to his memory mere incidents of a fantastic vision, and had he been the prey of a delusion in which the Circassian Slave was a heroine supplied by his own overheated imagination?

Yes, it must be so. And yet, as he raised himself up in his bed and looked all about the apartment, with the bewilderment of one who knows not yet whether he be really awake or still dreaming, his eyes caught the sight of the blue domino upon the chair by the side of the couch.

Unable to endure the agonizing suspense which now seized upon him, he rang the bell violently.

The summons was almost immediately answered by his valet.

"Gilbert, what time was it when I came home last night?" demanded the nobleman, assuming a tone of indifference; for he did not choose his dependent to observe the excitement of feeling under which he was labouring.

"It was about two o'clock this morning, my lord," was the response.

"Ah!" was the earl's involuntary ejaculation; for the conviction struck him, with the withering effect of lightning, that the adventures of the past night were indeed no dream. "Well, was I in rather a curious state, or how was it?" he demanded, impatiently.

"Since your lordship asks the question," said Gilbert, "I am bound to reply. The truth, then, is that your lordship was so exceedingly overcome by liquor as to be entirely insensible."

"And who was kind enough to bring me home?" inquired the nobleman, his heart sinking lower and lower every instant.

"Your lordship arrived in a carriage."

"Whose carriage?" was the demand, uttered with almost savage impatience.

"I do not know, my lord," returned Gilbert. "It was a plain one of dark colour."

"Ah!" again ejaculated Montgomery, remembering a certain point in Florimel's narrative where the barouche was similarly described. "But go on. Who came with me?"

"A footman had charge of your lordship."

"A tall man, a very tall man?" exclaimed the earl, the fever of his impatience amounting almost to a frenzy.

"I believe he was, my lord," responded the valet; "but really I took little notice of him, unless it was to observe that he studiously averted his countenance from the light of the street-lamp, as he helped to lift your lordship out of the carriage."

"But did he say nothing?" demanded Montgomery.

"Merely that your lordship had indulged somewhat too freely where you had passed the evening," replied the valet. "The carriage immediately drove away, and I put your lordship to bed."

"You may retire," said the nobleman.

Gilbert accordingly withdrew; and the instant the door closed behind him, the unhappy earl gave vent to his tortured feelings in a moan of indescribable anguish, and, burying his head in the pillows, he yielded to all the excruciating agonies of his terrible reflections.

For he now remembered that he had placed not only his honour, but his very life, in the hands of a woman totally unknown to him; and the termination of his interview with her was by no means of a reassuring nature. Indeed, it was impossible to blind himself to the damning fact that with the most exquisite skill and a marvellous refinement of astuteness, she had succeeded in wheedling him out of secrets which might be used against him with an effect that he shuddered to contemplate.

Recoiling in horror from this stage of his agonizing reflections, he cursed, oh, how bitterly, bitterly, he cursed his folly, his worse than folly, his madness, raving, stark, staring, incomprehensible madness, in divulging such tremendous secrets to an utter stranger. But the evil was done; it was irrevocable, as are all deeds which belong to the past, and, like too many of those incidents in the life of man, it left behind bitter food for reflection.

CHAPTER XLV

THE PIOUS TRAVELLERS

THE morning which followed the night of the masquerade, and all the incidents resulting therefrom, was clear, bright, and beautiful.

At about half-past nine o'clock on this said agreeable morning, two individuals might have been observed riding quietly along the road running through Blackheath. One was mounted upon an animal which its proprietor, no doubt, called a horse; but it was the most wretched specimen of skin and bones that was ever compelled to perform active service instead of being immolated at a knacker's yard for the benefit of sausage-makers and purveyors of cats' meat. The other individual was seated upon the back, or rather, the hind-quarters of one of those useful quadrupeds called donkeys; and instead of keeping by the side of his companion, he rode respectfully behind him.

But who are these travellers, that must even at the first glance remind our readers so strongly of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza? Who are these wayfarers, mounted upon beasts that certainly might have a more comely appearance?

The one sitting so demurely on the back of the wretched Rozinante is none other than our dearly beloved friend, the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby, and the humble individual bestriding the noble ass is his faithful follower, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax.

And if they were any other than two such highly respectable and soul-saving "vessels" we should be disposed to laugh heartily at the ridiculous figure which they both cut on the present occasion; but being the leaders of the New Lights, we must contemplate their progress with awe and

record their adventures with as much gravity as we can command for the purpose. At the same time, we are bound to admit that there was considerable extenuation on behalf of the small boys who roared and yelled and hooted as the reverend travellers passed by the spots where they were playing; for Mr. Sneaksby had evidently put on his most pathetic air of sanctimonious misery, and had screwed up his countenance to the extremest pitch of pious wretchedness, while Mr. Paxwax looked uncommonly like a man who, having been awfully drunk overnight, labours under the effect of an excruciating headache next morning, and wears an aspect as doleful as if he were just going to be hanged.

Slowly did the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby and Ichabod Paxwax journey along, the horse on which the former was mounted maintaining a shuffling, shambling pace, as if it were as pious as its rider and had a violent inclination to fall upon its knees, and the donkey jogging onward in a sullen, obstinate, dogged manner, as if he had made up his mind that no earthly power should be able to impel him into an accelerated speed.

"Five miles have we ridden, Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, at length breaking a long silence and glancing at a mile-stone as he spoke, "and verily it hath taken us two hours to achieve this much of our journey."

"Two mortal hours, Brother Sneaksby," answered Ichabod; "and, behold, my nether parts are already sorely inflamed by the unpleasant motion of this obstinate beast."

"Of a surety, when I behold the trouble which thine animal causeth thee, Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, "I no longer marvel that Balaam should have been angered by his ass."

"And if Balaam had possessed a horse, he assuredly would not have ridden the ass," rejoined Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, somewhat savagely.

"My dear brother, thou art impatient," said the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby, in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"Why, when one is pretty well raw exactly where it is most inconvenient to be so," observed Ichabod, with continued acrimony in his tone, "it is enough to make him somewhat ruffled in his temper."

"Thou art deficient in grace, Brother Paxwax," said his leader, reproachfully.

"Verily, and it is rather a supply of grease which I need at this moment, Brother Sneaksby," retorted Ichabod.

"Dost thou turn my words to ridicule?" exclaimed the reverend gentleman, now speaking sharply himself. "Truly, and this is most disrespectful on thy part, Brother Paxwax. It is likewise unjust and unkind, seeing that I am in no way an accessory to the galling which thou receivest in the breech from the uncouth trotting of that animal. For when it was resolved by the elders last evening that a deputation should repair to Dartford, and when you and I were requested to undertake that grave and solemn duty, thou didst of thine own accord declare thine intention of riding upon an ass, as a proof of thy meekness and a sign of thy humility."

"Since we are alone together, Brother Sneaksby," observed Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, who was writhing miserably upon the saddle, and making the most awful contortions with his full-moon countenance, "I will honestly and frankly confess that I chose this asinine mode of conveyance inasmuch as I am unaccustomed to bestride the nobler animal called a horse."

"And therefore you perceive, Brother Paxwax, that thy duplicity is deservedly punished," said Mr. Sneaksby. "Thou didst arrogate to thyself meekness and humility in selecting the ass, and the hidden reason was thine incapacity to ride the horse. Dost thou know, Brother Paxwax, what the ungodly would call thee?"

"What?" demanded Ichabod.

"A humbug," replied his reverend leader.

"Then if the ungodly did," exclaimed Mr. Paxwax, "I would pull off my coat, tuck up my shirt-sleeves, and punch the ungodly's head."

"Oh, thou man of wrath!" ejaculated Mr. Sneaksby, dropping the reins and holding up his hands in sanctimonious horror at the warlike threat.

But as the travellers were at this moment descending a hill, and the horse more than ever required to have his head held up, on account of his kneeling propensities, the result of Mr. Sneaksby's sudden abandonment of the reins was that the beast stumbled over a stone, and the reverend leader of the New Lights was pitched airily and neatly over the animal's head.

"Murder!" roared the reverend gentleman, as he rolled over and over upon the dusty road.

"Fire!" ejaculated Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, not knowing, in the bewilderment of the moment, what was the precise nature of the alarm which he ought to raise.

"Of a verity this is marvellously unpleasant," groaned forth Mr. Sneaksby, slowly and painfully rising from the ground and rubbing himself all over. "I am sorely bruised, but I thank God that no bones are broken. But now I cannot remount this graceless beast without assistance, and, in all Christian charity, Brother Paxwax, art thou bound to give me a leg up."

"Be it as thou sayest," exclaimed Mr. Paxwax, descending with a sort of gingerly precaution from his donkey; for the poor man was indeed enduring excruciating pain from the cause already hinted at.

Having just rubbed off the dust from his reverend leader's garments by means of his pocket-handkerchief, Mr. Paxwax endeavoured to hoist that reverend gentleman upon the horse; but just at the moment when the said reverend gentleman was about to throw his leg over, the animal started suddenly aside, and the result was that Mr. Sneaksby fell heavily a second time, bearing down Mr. Paxwax with him.

Up they both got in woful plight; and it really may be pardoned them if they both gave vent to those little ejaculatory expressions of irritation which are vulgarly called oaths. Indeed, we are bound, as honest historians, to admit that the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby damned the horse's eyes, while Mr. Ichabod Paxwax proclaimed an ardent desire to cut his cursed liver out. Their very venial impatience being thus expended in imprecations, they regarded each other with looks of shame and confusion.

"Brother Paxwax, didst thou hear the words that fell from my lips?" said Mr. Sneaksby, in a humiliated and contrite tone.

"No, that I didn't," exclaimed Ichabod. "Neither did you hear what I said, Brother Sneaksby."

"Verily and my ears were closed," was the response.

Mutually cheered by these assurances, they brushed the dust off each other's garments, and having performed this "Christian office," as they termed it, they made another

attempt in respect to the "leg up." But this time Mr. Paxwax hoisted his reverend and venerated friend so suddenly up that the said reverend and venerated friend pitched completely over the animal, and rolled in the dust on the other side.

"Damnation seize you for a clumsy fool!" roared Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby, now irritated beyond all power of endurance; and starting up from the ground, he rushed after Mr. Ichabod Paxwax with the evident intention of inflicting personal chastisement upon him.

But Ichabod, despite of the menace which he had just now uttered relative to punching the head of the ungodly, was at the bottom an arrant coward; and darting away, he led Mr. Sneaksby a race, now running around the horse and the ass, then dodging in between them, until his reverend pursuer was quite exhausted.

"Brother Paxwax," said this gentleman, panting for breath, "let there be no strife between us, but give me the hand of peace."

"Cheerfully will I respond unto thy Christian proposal, Brother Sneaksby," exclaimed Ichabod; and he advanced in full confidence and with extended hand toward his leader.

"There, take that for your pains," ejaculated Mr. Sneaksby, dealing Mr. Paxwax a tremendous blow on the left eye the moment he got him within arm's reach.

This treacherous proceeding astounded Brother Ichabod even more completely than the assault staggered him; and, clapping his hand to the damaged optic, he gazed with the other in a sort of stupid consternation upon his bellicose leader.

"Now who is the man of wrath?" he at length exclaimed, but prudently stepping back a pace or two, in order to avoid a repetition of the punishment.

"I love thee, Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, whose anger was now appeased by the vent it had found. "Yea, verily, I love thee, and therefore do I chasten thee."

"Deuce take such love!" growled Mr. Paxwax. "It has cost me no small measure of pain, besides the unpleasantness of appearing before the Reverend Joel Brugg with an eye bunged up."

"You shall bathe it in the limpid waters at the next spring we come to, Ichabod," said Mr. Sneaksby, now

adopting a conciliatory tone, for, in truth, he was heartily ashamed of his intemperance.

"I would rather have a drop of strong water at the next public-house," quoth Mr. Paxwax.

"That likewise shalt thou have, Ichabod," rejoined the reverend gentleman.

Soothed by this promise, Mr. Paxwax once more assisted his loving friend to a leg up; and this time the leader of the New Lights was safely hoisted into his saddle. Ichabod then remounted his ass; but when the horse was put in motion, the donkey positively and sternly refused to budge an inch. There stood the stubborn animal just like a statue, gazing upon vacancy, and apparently nailed to the ground. Vainly did Mr. Paxwax coax him with sundry pattings on the neck, fruitlessly did he try the usual talismanic influence of "Gee up!" Not an inch would the beast move; but there he stood planted in the middle of the road, with the influential member of the New Lights upon his back looking quite as much like an ass as himself.

In fact, the appearance of the man and his donkey was almost as ridiculous as that of the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington perched on the arch at the corner of the Green Park; and therefore the reader may judge how very stolid indeed Mr. Ichabod Paxwax and his stubborn ass must have looked.

Fortunately for the hero of this dilemma, a stage-coach happened to pass at the time; and the coachman, instantaneously comprehending the position of affairs, bestowed such a cut with his whip upon the donkey that all his obstinacy evaporated in a moment, and, kicking up his heels to the great discomfiture of Ichabod's equilibrium and the great aggravation of his physical sufferings, the beast started off into a sharp canter.

The whistling sound of the whip through the air was not lost upon the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby's Rozinante, which actually and positively broke into a gallop that must have even astonished itself, and would have certainly struck its owner with surprise had he been present, seeing that the animal had not performed such a feat for the last ten years.

In this manner did the cavalcade proceed for a short distance, when the appearance of a public-house became the signal for a halt. There the two pious travellers got their

clothes properly brushed; and Mr. Paxwax bathed his eye, which was indeed pretty nearly bunged up, as he himself had predicted. However, all his animosity vanished when he found that while he had been busy in abluting his optic, Mr. Sneaksby had ordered devilled kidneys and a quart of egg-flip, for both of which species of creature comforts Mr. Paxwax entertained a considerable liking.

The refreshments were relished with a zest all the more keen inasmuch as the chosen vessels of the New Lights had breakfasted at the early hour of seven, in order to commence their journey at half-past; and having disposed of the kidneys and the flip and read the landlord a homily upon brotherly love and the blessings of abstinence, they mounted their beasts and resumed their way.

The church clock at Dartford was proclaiming the hour of noon when the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby and Mr. Ichabod Paxwax made their entry into that town.

"Hooray! brayvo!" yelled forth a parcel of boys who were playing at marbles in the middle of the street; and, hastily gathering up their "alley taws" and their "commonneys," they began dancing and capering and hooting and bawling on either side of the sanctimonious travellers.

"Beware, boys, beware!" exclaimed Mr. Sneaksby, assuming a look of awful solemnity. "Remember how the wicked youths were served who insulted Elisha. Are ye not afraid that bears will come forth from yon woods in the distance and eat ye up?"

"There b'ain't no beers in these here parts," cried the ringleader of the juvenile mob; and as he "took a sight" at the reverend gentleman at the same time, his mischievous companions all became convulsed with laughter.

"Gee up!" vociferated another boy; and picking up a stick, he inflicted divers hard thwacks upon Mr. Sneaksby's horse.

"Now then, old stubbornness!" cried a third urchin, addressing himself to the donkey; and while Mr. Paxwax was remonstrating with him upon the impropriety and ungodliness of his conduct, another boy quietly and cleverly attached a bramble to the animal's tail.

Thereupon the ass began to exhibit divers symptoms of uneasiness, to the infinite disgust and annoyance of Mr. Paxwax, who was scarcely able to retain his seat.

"Avaunt, incarnate imps of Satan!" he thundered forth, as his hands grasped the mane of the donkey; for the beast was kicking at one moment, running forward at another, then stopping short, then backing on the pavement in a manner most threatening to the shop-windows, and then galloping on again at a rate which almost jolted its unhappy rider to pieces.

And all this time the mischievous boys were keeping up with the cavalcade, yelling, hooting, tossing up their caps in the air, and playing off the artillery of their jokes and gibes against the miserable victims of this juvenile persecution. The tradesmen came forth from their shops, windows were thrown open and crowded with faces, the passengers in the streets stopped to behold the amusing scene, and the "oldest inhabitant in the place" did not remember so extraordinary an excitement having ever before disturbed the tranquillity of Dartford.

At length some individual took compassion on Mr. Paxwax and removed the bramble from the donkey's tail; and this same "good Samaritan," as Mr. Sneaksby denominated him, gave the necessary information to guide the pious travellers to the dwelling of the Reverend Joel Brugg. Accordingly, in a few minutes they reached a public-house which stood within a few yards of their destination; and having put up their cattle at that place of "accommodation for man and beast," they hastened to knock at Mr. Brugg's door, the persevering small boys forming a line along the edge of the pavement and indulging in sundry ironical cheers and jocular observations.

We must here pause for a few moments to state that the Reverend Joel Brugg was the founder and pastor of a certain sect bearing the name of Candelabrians, and who were tolerably numerous in Dartford and the adjacent districts. The house in which Mr. Brugg dwelt with the wife of his bosom and the numerous family upon whose countenance he had stamped his image, and a very curious one it was, too, alike in the original and in its eleven miniature reflections, his house, we say, was a neat yellow brick building, containing eight rooms, and having a piece of garden-ground at the back, the whole having been purchased by the money of the Candelabrians for the express behoof of their revered pastor and the numerous tribe of Bruggs.

The Reverend Joel himself was a tall, thin, bony man, not unlike Mr. Sneaksby in figure, but having a face of very tallowy complexion and thin black hair, combed in a sleek manner over his forehead. He had large greenish eyes, bearing an amazing resemblance to boiled gooseberries; and his demeanour was as solemnly sanctimonious, his gait as demurely prim, his speech as deliberately measured, and his tone as awfully sepulchral as the most fastidious "saint" could possibly desire. His wife was as like him as if she had been his sister instead of his spouse: tall, thin, and hatchet-faced, she looked both the prude and the vixen, although Mr. Brugg was wont to represent her as "the very best woman in existence."

At the moment when Mr. Sneaksby and Mr. Paxwax knocked at the door, Mr. and Mrs. Brugg were in the middle of a pretty little domestic dispute relative to the dinner, or rather, what it was to consist of; for a pious Candelabrian had sent the pastor a sucking-pig in the morning, and the said pastor was desirous of having it cooked for that day's enjoyment, whereas Mrs. Brugg was equally anxious that the cold remains of a leg of mutton should be previously disposed of. The dispute was waxing so warm that the Reverend Joel Brugg was on the point of coming to blows with "the very best woman in existence," when the loud double knock fell upon their ears with startling effect; and the next moment they were frightened almost out of their wits by the yells, hootings, and hurrahings of the small boys forming the New Lights' escort.

A miserable, half-starved, dirty servant of all work, whose age was about seventeen, and who had a hungry eye and a famished look altogether, was hastily despatched to open the door, and the visitors were immediately conducted into the front parlour. The mob of juveniles then gave "one cheer more," and dispersed to resume their game with alley taws and commoneys.

Mr. and Mrs. Brugg were in the kitchen when the New Lights arrived at their house; and on the wretched servant delivering the names of those worthies, the pastor hastily observed to his wife, "Well, upon my word, my love, I think you were right after all, and we will keep the pig till to-morrow. For these chaps are certain to stay to dinner: indeed, we cannot possibly avoid asking them."

"Then, mind we're water drinkers, Mr. Brugg," returned his better half, with a most emphatic significancy; "for I am not going to waste our money in buying spirits for them fellers, I can tell you."

"Certainly not, my dear, certainly not," exclaimed Joel, approvingly. "We're water drinkers to the backbone — for this day, at least."

Having exchanged these hasty observations, and arrived at so pleasant an understanding with each other, Mr. and Mrs. Brugg proceeded with solemn demeanour to the parlour.

"Welcome, good Brother Sneaksby; welcome, Brother Paxwax," said the Reverend Joel, pressing their hands cordially. "This is Mrs. Brugg, my dear friends, and I'm proud of the opportunity of introducing her to you. A nobler example of a wife cannot be found; indeed, she is in all respects the very best woman in existence."

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, Brother Brugg," said the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby, after having paid his respects to the lady.

"Pray sit down, gentlemen, and make yourselves quite at home," she exclaimed, assuming as hospitable a demeanour as it was in her nature to put on. "But, dear me! what is the matter with the gentleman's eye?" she demanded, fixing her looks upon Ichabod's damaged optic.

"It was an injury received by my pious brother when engaged in the Lord's service," Mr. Sneaksby hastened to observe. "For, behold, as we journeyed along the great highway which men call the Dover Road, we observed certain ungodly vessels employed in breaking stones. The discourse of these benighted sinners did reach our ears, and it shocked us sorely to perceive that for every one harmless word that fell from their lips, they gave utterance to a dozen oaths. Brother Paxwax, ever zealous in the good cause, did spur his ass into a trot and ride forward to remonstrate with those men of Belial. Whereupon one of them, more deeply influenced by Satan than all the rest, did rise from his seat on the stones, gird up his loins —"

"And bung up my eye with his fist," added Mr. Paxwax, by way of affording a suitable peroration for his superior's pathetic narrative.

"Alas! it is our lot to receive stripes and be beaten with rods in the good service," said Mr. Joel Brugg, turning up

the whites of his eyes and shaking his head solemnly. "But the divine grace and two leeches applied to-night, Brother Paxwax, will accomplish a cure. And now, my beloved friends, you will break bread with me, and then we will discourse upon the subject of your visit. My dear," he added, turning toward his wife, "what hast thou in the way of provender to offer unto these pious wayfarers?"

"A crust and a cup of cold water will suffice, dear Brother Brugg," said Mr. Sneaksby.

"Or anything that you may have provided for your own frugal meal, dear sister," observed Mr. Paxwax, addressing the lady; and at the same time he gave a sniff in order to ascertain whether there was any odour of roast meat in the house.

"Verily, and we would not insult your known virtues in respect to temperance, dear brethren, by placing before you the fleshpots of Egypt," said the Reverend Joel Brugg.

"Assuredly not," added his better half. "A morsel of cold mutton and a potato, with some water from a delicious spring in the neighbourhood, constitute our repast of this day, under the divine blessing; and to our humble board ye are truly welcome."

The Reverend Mr. Sneaksby's countenance became uncommonly blank for a moment, and Mr. Ichabod Paxwax made an awful face, as this frugal bill of fare was submitted to their consideration; but, instantly commanding their feelings, they laid the soothing unction to their souls that hospitable people very often speak modestly of the really handsome banquet which is forthcoming.

This happy delusion was, however, speedily dispelled by the entrance of the servant of all work to lay the cloth, and by the appearance of the cold mutton, the dish of potatoes, and a large jug of water. Mr. Sneaksby and Mr. Paxwax exchanged rapid glances expressive of unmitigated disgust; and even their last hope that something better than the limpid element from the spring might be forthcoming was totally destroyed when they saw the servant leave the room without receiving any instructions to fetch beer from the public-house.

The three eldest Masters Brugg and Miss Tabitha Brugg were now introduced to take their places at the dinner-table, they having the privilege of dining with their parents;

while a terrific stamping, screaming, and quarrelling in the room overhead showed pretty plainly that the more juvenile olive-branches of the Brugg genus were doomed to the ignominious captivity of the nursery.

Mr. Joel Brugg now said a grace which lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour, and during which every one around the table held his head almost down into his plate; but Mr. Paxwax was all the while thinking to himself that the provender was by no means commensurate with the thanksgiving. However, as he was exceedingly hungry, in spite of the devilled kidneys and the egg-flip, he managed to devour his share of the cold mutton, an example which was worthily followed by the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby. For the sake of appearances, they were likewise compelled to inflict the penalty of cold water upon their stomachs; and although Mr. Sneaksby gulped down his supply with as good a grace as he could assume, Mr. Paxwax could not possibly conceal his abhorrence for the primitive fluid.

The repast was ended, the cloth was removed, and the three boys had retired with Miss Tabitha, when the servant of all work, either in ignorance of her mistress's parsimonious intentions, or else in a little spirit of spite for numerous petty acts of tyranny inflicted upon her, exclaimed, in a loud tone, as she stood on the threshold of the door, "Please, ma'am, shall I put the gin on the table and bring up the hot water, as usual?"

Mr. Ichabod Paxwax actually bounded upon his chair in delight; and Mr. Sneaksby's mouth instantaneously began to water. These little circumstances were not lost upon Mr. and Mrs. Brugg, who exchanged rapid glances; for the domestic had committed a blunder which seriously compromised both their hospitality and their parsimony.

"Verily," said Mr. Paxwax, fearful lest a negative should be put upon the maid of all work's proposal, "I think that a leetle drop of something warm would — would — do my eye good," he added, no better excuse suggesting itself at the instant.

"Well, then," exclaimed Mrs. Brugg, sharply, and with a threatening look at the miserable servant, "if there does happen to be any gin in the house, we will break through an established rule and partake of a thimbleful each in

honour of our beloved guests. You may bring up the hot water."

"Oh, I know there's plenty of gin in the bottle, ma'am," said the domestic; "because I got it filled yesterday at the public, and you and master only drank half of it."

"Go and get the hot water, I say," almost shrieked forth Mrs. Brugg, darting terrific glances at the unfortunate maid.

There was no help for it, and the lady was accordingly compelled to open her cupboard and produce the bottle, much to the satisfaction of the New Lights. Glasses, hot water, sugar, and lemons were speedily placed upon the table, and having brewed himself a good jorum, Ichabod was himself again.

But how cordially in her heart did Mrs. Brugg hate and detest both that individual and Mr. Sneaksby when she saw them half-fill their tumblers with gin before they poured in the water; and at every sip they took she secretly wished that the steaming fluid might choke them. Indeed, being scarcely able to restrain her vexation, she was compelled to rush out into the kitchen and pour forth her envenomed feelings against the miserable servant; then, having thus far relieved herself, she hurried up into the nursery, where she found a vent for the remainder of her ill-humour by boxing the children's ears all around.

These two scenes of domestic life having passed off to her satisfaction, she returned to the parlour, but only to experience a horror and a consternation which, as she declared to some friend on a subsequent occasion, "almost proved the death of her," for, lo and behold! while she was employed in thrashing her olive-branches in the nursery, Mr. Brugg had actually sent out for more gin.

"Well, my dearly beloved friends," her husband began to say, the moment she thus returned to the room, — for he, prudent man, was anxious that she should catch the conciliatory words that he sent forth, in order to avert a storm, — "I have already told you that my wife is the very best woman in existence — Oh, here you are, my dear!" he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself, as if he did not know that she had been standing for half a minute upon the threshold. "I was only telling our Christian friends what an excellent wife you are to me, and how hospitable you always prove yourself toward your guests — Ahem!

my dear, will you take a leetle drop more gin? It is good for the stomach's sake, as the apostle said of wine."

"No, Mr. Brugg, I will not take another drop, and I beg that you will not either," exclaimed the irritated lady. "If these gentlemen choose to finish the bottle, let them, but you sha'n't help them, I can tell you;" and as she resumed her seat she darted spiteful looks at the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby and Mr. Ichabod Paxwax.

"My dear, my dear," said the Reverend Joel Brugg, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "I hope you will not prove otherwise than — than — the very best woman in existence."

"Now you leave me alone and go on with your business, whatever it may be," exclaimed Mrs. Brugg, folding her arms and leaning back in the chair in a very determined manner, as if she were performing the part of sentinel upon the gin bottle, whereon her looks now remained fixed.

"Well, my Christian brethren," resumed Mr. Brugg, casting uneasy glances from time to time at his wife, "let us take into consideration the matter whereof ye are come to treat with me. And if my poor comprehension does not lead me astray, this visit on your part ariseth from certain observations which I made last week when I saw you in London."

"Yea, verily," responded Mr. Sneaksby; "for on that occasion thou didst hint at the possibility of the amalgamation of the pious Candelabrians with the blessed New Lights."

"And forasmuch as the Candelabrians are numerous and influential," said Mr. Brugg, "the New Lights should join us and become merged in our community."

"Nay, Brother Brugg," exclaimed Mr. Sneaksby, "the Candelabrians must become incorporated with the New Lights."

"Surely you are dreaming, Brother Sneaksby!" cried Mr. Brugg, becoming excited. "What, the Candelabrians resign that name which took me six months to think of and three more to fix the precise manner of spelling it? No, sir, no; it can't be done. Besides, when I founded the sect of Candelabrians, I meant to imply that they were the candles to light the world to the reading of the Scriptures."

"And pray what else are the New Lights?" demanded Mr. Sneaksby, likewise growing irritable.

"Ay, what are the New Lights, I should like to know?" exclaimed Mr. Paxwax.

"Shall I tell you?" said Mrs. Brugg, her lips white and quivering with the vixenish ill-humour that stirred her soul.

"If you choose, ma'am," responded the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby. "I should like to hear your opinion of the New Lights," he added, with a sarcastic emphasis.

"And so should I," said Mr. Paxwax. "Come, ma'am, out with it. What are we?"

"Humbugs, rank humbugs!" ejaculated Mrs. Brugg. "There, now I've told you, and my mind's relieved of a weight."

Thus speaking, the virago started from her chair, seized upon the gin bottle, the sugar, and the lemons, and proceeded to lock them all up in the cupboard. Then, bouncing to the room door, she threw it wide open, and stopping short upon the threshold, she turned toward her husband, exclaiming, "Now, Mr. Brugg, the sooner you get rid of them drunken New Lights, the better."

And again bouncing onward, she hastened along a passage leading to the kitchen, the door of which she banged behind her with a violence that shook the whole house to its foundation.

"Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, rising from his chair as soon as he had somewhat recovered from the stupefaction into which this extraordinary proceeding threw him, "we are in the tents of the ungodly, and it is time for us to be gone."

"Brother Sneaksby," responded Ichabod, likewise quitting his seat, "we cannot remain beneath this inhospitable fig-tree any longer — for the gin has disappeared," he added, in a low voice to himself.

"My dear Christian friends," said Mr. Brugg, imploringly, for he was afraid that the scene would be reported abroad to his discredit, "I humbly beseech you to pardon this treatment on the part of — of — the very best woman in existence."

"May the devil take such women — and you too, sir," cried the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby, unable to keep a rein upon his temper any longer. "I never saw such an accursed termagant in all my life."

"Nor I such a wretched henpecked old fool," cried Mr.

Paxwax, rushing out into the passage as he spoke and opening the front door, for fear that his remark might provoke Mr. Brugg to hurl the jug of hot water at his head. "Come along, Brother Sneaksby."

"I am coming, Brother Paxwax," said this reverend gentleman, who was not quite such a coward as his satellite; and, having flung a look of mingled ferocity and contempt upon the astounded Joe Brugg, he stalked majestically out of the house, leaving the front door wide open behind him.

Repairing to the public-house where they had put up their cattle, the two New Lights sat down in the parlour and began to console themselves with steaming jorums of gin punch for the insult and inhospitality which they had experienced at Brother Brugg's; and as the injuries which their feelings had sustained were manifold and deep, the amount of solace required was necessarily proportionate. But as this solace consisted in gin punch, in the same ratio that it lightened their hearts so did it lighten their heads; and when, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, they paid their bill and issued forth to mount their beasts, their pace was so unsteady that they mutually agreed there never was a place with such wretchedly loose and uneven pavement in all the world as Dartford.

Followed by the broad grins of the landlord, the hostler, and several hangers-on about the inn, the pious travellers commenced their journey homeward. But again had they to endure the persecution of the small boys, who, perceiving the inebriated condition of the two sanctimonious vessels, became perfectly uproarious in their glee and so extremely practical in their jokes that Mr. Sneaksby had two falls from his horse and Mr. Paxwax three from his ass before the limits of Dartford were reached. At length the urchins took leave of them, and they pursued their way without further molestation of that kind.

Presently a tremendous shower of rain began to fall, and the two leaders of the New Lights were speedily wet through to the skin. Vainly did they urge on their beasts to gain the nearest wayside public-house; the horse proved almost as obstinate as the donkey, and before a sheltering roof even appeared in sight, the reverend travellers were completely drenched. The water poured down from the broad

brims of their hats as if they were sluices opened for the occasion, and never did human beings look or feel more thoroughly miserable. At length they put up at a tavern, where they resolved to sup and pass the night; and with sorrow be it recorded that the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby and his friend, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, were conveyed blind drunk to bed.

On the following morning they resumed their journey, the weather having cleared up; and with faces woefully elongated by reason of the headache which they experienced and the remorseful memories which filled their brains, they entered the metropolis at about midday. Proceeding straight to the stables where they had hired the mettled charger and the noble donkey, they felt a perfect relief when they thus got rid of their cattle; and hastening to Jermyn Street, they made such improvements in their toilet as rendered them fit to present themselves to the august synod of New Light elders assembled in the vestry-room of Salem to receive them.

The reader will scarcely require to be informed that they denounced in the strongest terms the inhospitable conduct of the Reverend Joel Brugg of Dartford; but in giving an account of their visit and its failure, neither Mr. Sneaksby nor Mr. Paxwax thought it at all necessary to state how tremendously tipsy they had both got.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE AFFLICTED MAIDEN

IN the morning after the adventures at the masquerade, Pauline Clarendon awoke in a magnificently furnished bed-chamber, the canopy overhanging the couch and the tops of the looking-glass frames being surmounted with ducal coronets.

For a few instants she was a prey to a wild bewilderment as she cast her eyes around; but almost immediately her ideas settled themselves into the proper places in her brain, and she recollected all that had occurred on the preceding evening, where she was now, and how she came thither. Then, as the fancied perfidy of Lord Florimel rose uppermost in her mind and dominated all her other thoughts, she buried her countenance in the pillow and gave way to an agonized ebullition of grief.

The flood of tears which she thus poured forth relieved her somewhat, and she had just dried the pearly drops upon her long lashes and her pale cheeks when the door opened gently and the brilliant Duchess of Devonshire entered the apartment.

"My dearest Pauline," she exclaimed, approaching the bed and taking the young lady's hand, "do tell me what has happened. Nothing has occurred to Octavia, I hope."

"Nothing, my generous friend, my noble benefactress," said Pauline. "But I must apologize most sincerely for seeking your abode last night, especially in a masquerade apparel and totally unattended."

"Do not say anything in the shape of an excuse, Pauline," interrupted the duchess, seating herself by the bedside, "but tell me what you will in the form of an explanation, as between friends. Something unpleasant has happened,

I am very sure, for your eyes are red with weeping, and, moreover, I am well aware that this masquerading adventure was no idle whim nor foolish freak on your part."

"Your surmise is correct, my kind friend," observed the young lady, subduing with a violent effort a fresh outbreak of her grief.

"I know you too well, understand your character too profoundly, and entertain too high an opinion of you, Pauline," said the duchess, "to imagine for a moment that you would venture alone to a masquerade without some strong and sufficient reason. Therefore, even if you should refuse me your confidence, I shall not think the less favourably of you."

"But I do not intend to refuse you my confidence," exclaimed Pauline. "I have received too many kindnesses at your hands not to regard you as the best friend I have in the world. When circumstances forced me to abandon my father's dwelling, you offered me a home, and a home has your Grace likewise provided for my unfortunate sister. Do not, therefore, imagine for a moment that I am unmindful of all you have done for me, or ungrateful for the many bounties of which I have been the recipient."

"I know that you are good and amiable and candid, my sweetest friend," said the duchess, "and on that account I have conceived a warm affection for you. Tell me if there be any way in which I can still serve you, and you may rely upon my zeal and readiness in your cause."

"First let me unbosom myself to your Grace," answered Pauline, "and then I may perhaps have a favour to implore at your hands."

Having thus spoken, the young lady took up some of her masquerading apparel which lay on a chair near the bed, and drawing forth a letter from the bosom of the dress, she handed it to the Duchess of Devonshire.

The contents of that billet were as follows:

"Lord Florimel is unfaithful to you. While affecting a complete reformation in his conduct, his private life is as profligate as ever; but his intrigues are carried on with a greater circumspection. To-morrow night he will be present at a masquerade at Covent Garden Theatre, disguised in a blue domino edged with a peculiar braiding and having a star of the same material on the top or crown of the hood.

The object of his visit to that scene is a new love intrigue, and you may convince yourself with your own eyes that such is the fact. The writer of this note is animated by no other desire than a sincere wish to prevent so much virtue, generous confidence, amiability, and candour being sacrificed to such profound hypocrisy, such foul deceit, and such unpardonable treachery; for by all those virtues are you characterized, and by all these faults is Lord Florimel distinguished.

"Well aware that you are so utterly unacquainted with all the arts of London dissipation as to be ignorant even how to proceed in order to procure at so short a notice a suitable disguise for the purpose which this letter naturally suggests, the writer has made the necessary arrangements at a respectable fancy-dress warehouse in London (the card of which is enclosed). The mistress of the establishment will have a chamber prepared for you to perform your toilet in the strictest privacy, and you can proceed thence in a hackney-coach to the theatre, which is at no great distance from the warehouse.

"One word more. The writer positively and earnestly enjoins you not to address a syllable of reproach to Lord Florimel within the walls of the theatre. You are even forbidden to accost him in a manner that may enable him to guess who you are. On the contrary, you must restrain your feelings and take time to deliberate upon the proper course to be subsequently pursued."

"I need not ask whether you received confirmation of the suspicions which this anonymous letter excited," said the Duchess of Devonshire, in a tone of the profoundest sympathy, when she had brought the perusal of the document to a close. "Alas! my dear friend, those tears which are falling from your eyes prove that the information was indeed too true."

"Too true, yes, too true!" murmured Pauline, the big drops chasing each other down her cheeks and falling upon her fair virginal bosom as she sat up in the bed gazing with a look of the deepest affliction upon Georgiana. "This letter, which is dated, as you perceive, the day before yesterday, and is addressed to me at your own villa near Aylesbury, I received early yesterday morning; and, confiding my poor sister to the care of the nurse, I came to

London. At the warehouse mentioned in the note I purchased that fancy dress, and having assumed it, I proceeded to the theatre. The masque in the blue domino with the curious braiding was already there; but at first it struck me that he was too tall for Gabriel. However, after a time I mustered up courage to accost him, and, reckless of the injunctions so emphatically expressed in the concluding portion of the note, I asked who he was. Then, doubtless believing me to be the fair one whom he expected to meet at that place, he instantaneously announced himself as Lord Florimel, — yes, and in such terms, too, that left no doubt as to his perfidy."

Pauline stopped short, her voice almost suffocated with the deep sobs which rent her bosom; and the duchess, throwing her arms around the young lady's neck, besought her to moderate her grief.

"Oh, my dearest, dearest friend," exclaimed Pauline in a more hurried and painful accent than before, "you cannot wonder if my heart be ready to burst with this woe which is too vast for it to contain. For I have loved your perfidious cousin, oh, I have loved him as never woman loved before; and when his own lips, breathing his name in my ear last night, confirmed the terrible suspicion that was already rending my soul, 'twas as if the knell of doom were reverberating within the living cells of my brain. Boundless was my affection, an illimitable flood of the tenderest feelings knowing no ebb, but ever gushing with the impulse of love's springtide. Conceive, then, how fearful is the anguish attendant upon the reaction of such a love as this, and how every nerve must quiver with an ineffable excruciation. And, oh, if it were not that a feeling of pride, nay, rather of proud indignation, now sustained me, I should sink beneath the weight of this blow so cruel, so undeserved, so unexpected."

And as Pauline gave utterance to this last sentence, her countenance, a moment before so pale, became suddenly flushed with a crimson hue, and the pearly tears which still stood upon her cheeks shone lustrous as the dewdrops on the pomegranate.

"Had Gabriel remained true to his plight and faithful to the solemn promises which he so profusely breathed in my ears," she continued, after a long pause, and now speak-

ing in a deep, low tone, "mine would have proved a lot fraught with a happiness which no power of language can describe. But, alas!" she exclaimed, in a voice denoting a sudden and irresistible self-abandonment to the full tide of bitter affliction, while she pressed her hand forcibly upon her bosom as if to silence the beatings of her heart, "alas! that dream of bliss has now been destroyed, the vision has fled, never to return."

"Oh, speak not thus despondingly, my dearest Pauline," said the generous-hearted Georgiana. "Let me become the peace-maker between you —"

"No, my kind friend, that may not be," interrupted the young lady, her voice and manner suddenly resuming their wonted firmness. "The bond which linked our hearts is for ever broken, and nothing can restore my confidence in Gabriel. I loved him not for his fortune nor his title: I loved him for himself alone, and after all that occurred last night, there is an end of everything between us. But I have not yet explained to your Grace the termination of my adventures, and how I came to seek the protection and security of your abode. On leaving the theatre, I remembered that I had not informed the people at the fancy-dress warehouse that I should return to lay aside my masquerading attire and resume my own garb; and I knew it was then too late to disturb the mistress of the shop. I accordingly entered a vehicle and ordered the coachman to drive me to a respectable hotel. But I was already the object of an infamous conspiracy set on foot by that royal profligate to whom my poor sister is indebted for her ruin," added Pauline, with exceeding bitterness of tone and great excitement of manner.

"What, the prince dared to persecute you?" ejaculated the Duchess of Devonshire, who, in spite of her own levity of conduct and deficiency of virtuous principle, was shocked at the idea which Pauline's words had engendered in her mind.

"Yes, his Royal Highness dared to make me the object of his tender persecution," responded the young lady, still speaking in a tone of bitterness; "and, in pursuance of the intrigues which he had set on foot to ensnare me, I was taken to the infamous dwelling of Mrs. Brace the milliner, instead of to a respectable hotel."

"Oh, this is really too bad!" exclaimed Georgiana, in no affected tone of indignation. "He ought to have remembered that you were the sister of one who was already too deeply afflicted on his account."

"The future sovereign of these realms knows neither generosity nor remorse," said Pauline, emphatically; "and despite of my representations, my reproaches, my entreaties, he would have ruined me — oh, my God! he would have ruined me," she cried, shuddering all over at the recollection of the tremendous danger in which she had been involved, "had not my screams brought assistance. I escaped from his arms, I escaped from the house, and throwing myself into a vehicle which happened to be passing through the square at the moment, I ordered the coachman to take me to a dwelling where I knew that friendship would afford me a secure asylum. And that dwelling is Devonshire House."

"Where you are truly welcome, Pauline," exclaimed the duchess, in a compassionating tone. "I am grieved that I was not at home last night when you arrived; for perhaps the solace which a sincere friend might have proffered would not have proved unwelcome. On returning from Lady Dewhurst's, at whose residence his Grace and myself had passed the evening, I was amazed to hear that you had come to pay Devonshire House so unexpected a visit, and I hurried hither to ascertain whether anything unpleasant had occurred. But you were sleeping so soundly —"

"Ah! my kind friend, I was exhausted in mind and body," exclaimed Pauline, the tears once more starting forth upon her long lashes; "and I slept profoundly, it is true, but my slumbers were haunted with hideous dreams. However, I must strive to combat against the sorrow which now weighs upon me like an almost intolerable burden, and beneath which all my energies, mental and physical, seem to bend."

"And you will not permit me to act as a peace-maker between my faithless cousin Florimel and yourself?" said the splendid Georgiana, in a tone which testified how cheerfully she would undertake the task of pacification.

"No, never!" replied Pauline, with a resolute manner. "A thousand, thousand times do I thank your Grace for this generous desire to interfere in my behalf; but, although I can never cease to love Lord Florimel, yet I dare not risk the utter and total wreck of my peace of mind by becoming

the wife of a man who makes solemn pledges so lightly and breaks them so easily. Your Grace will therefore confer an infinite favour upon me by pressing that point no more. And now, as I wish to withdraw myself altogether from the possibility of receiving either visits or letters from Lord Florimel, and as I am likewise anxious to seek that seclusion which may shield me against any fresh persecutions that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales may possibly think fit to institute with regard to me, I purpose to retire with my unfortunate sister to some quiet neighbourhood, where I may pass my time in ministering to the cure of her wounded spirit and surrounding her with consolations when the restoration of her intellect will render such solace needful."

"And in what manner, my dear Pauline," asked the duchess, "can I assist your views in this respect?"

"By adding pecuniary succour to the generous aid your Grace has already afforded me," was the response. "I will not apply to my father; but I do not hesitate to solicit this boon at your hands, because I feel so much confidence in your friendship —"

"Enough, my dear Pauline," interposed the Duchess of Devonshire. "If you were to act otherwise than in this spirit of affectionate reliance, I should have been deeply grieved. And now tell me where you would like to fix your abode?"

"Previously to my father's removal to Cavendish Square," answered Pauline, "we resided in a pretty little house on a terrace called Paradise Villas, in the Edgeware Road. For upwards of eighteen months did we dwell there; and I feel some secret and unaccountable impulse urging me to return to that once happy home. Both the prince and Lord Florimel are aware that we once resided there; but they would never think of seeking me in my former abode. It is consequently my intention to repair thither presently and ascertain if the house which we lately occupied is still to let."

"Indeed, my dear Pauline, you shall not take that trouble upon yourself," exclaimed Georgiana. "You shall repose a few hours longer, for you are doubtless fatigued in body as well as in mind, and your breakfast shall be sent up to you in a few minutes. At midday you shall accompany me in the carriage to see all that I may have done for

you in the meantime, and then you shall hasten to Aylesbury to fetch Octavia."

Having thus spoken, the good-hearted duchess kissed Pauline's cheek with a pure sisterly affection, and then hurried from the room to escape the expressions of gratitude which the young lady, with tears streaming down her countenance, began to utter, in a voice broken by emotions.

In about a quarter of an hour a female servant made her appearance with a silver tray covered with the materials for an excellent breakfast; but poor Pauline had no appetite for any of the luxuries thus provided. Having partaken, however, of a cup of chocolate, she requested writing materials to be brought to her; and she also desired that a messenger might be sent to the fancy-dress warehouse to procure the apparel which she had left there on the preceding evening. These instructions were complied with; and having risen from the sumptuous couch and performed her toilet, Pauline sat down to pen a few lines to Lord Florimel.

Then, as she pondered, painfully pondered, upon the style which she ought to adopt, the words uttered by the Gipsy masque at the theatre on the preceding evening recurred to her memory, and she slowly repeated them over to herself:

"When a virtuous woman's dignity is offended by a faithless lover, she does not write a long letter of mingled complaint, upbraiding, and reproach; but she pens a few laconic words, commanding him to seek her presence no more, and leaving him to calculate and weigh all the motives which have suggested a proceeding at once so dignified and imperious."

And, her mind yielding to the bias of these suggestions, she indited a letter in the spirit thereof; but the precise nature of its contents will be explained hereafter.

Securing the billet in the bosom of her dress, to be posted only when her removal into her contemplated seclusion should have taken place, Pauline anxiously awaited the return of the duchess. Punctual to her promise, the beautiful and generous-hearted Georgiana repaired to the young lady's chamber, ready apparelled in her carriage dress; and, the vehicle being in attendance, they issued forth together.

On being seated in the carriage, the duchess ordered the coachman to drive to Paradise Villas, Edgeware Road;

then, as the vehicle rolled away from Devonshire House, she turned with an arch smile toward Pauline, observing, "The three hours which have elapsed since I left you, my dear friend, have not been wasted, as you shall presently see. His Grace, whom I made acquainted with the purpose which I entertained on your behalf, instantaneously despatched his agent to take the business in hand, and considerable progress is no doubt already made in the matter."

Pauline could only express her gratitude by tears, for her feelings were too deeply touched to allow the utterance of words. The duchess continued to discourse with her in the kindest manner, and in a short time the carriage stopped in front of Paradise Villas. From the window did Pauline cast her looks at the house where she had spent so many happy days, the house in which she had first become acquainted with Florimel, the house, too, where the Prince of Wales, under the name of Mr. Harley, had poured his insidious love-tales into the ears of her sister. There was much of mingled bitterness and pleasure in the reminiscences thus suddenly called up in the young lady's mind; but, even if the latter feeling did not altogether predominate, there was, nevertheless, a melancholy charm in the prospect of returning to an abode she had once loved and every feature of which was so familiar to her recollection.

On alighting from the carriage, the duchess and Pauline entered the house, the door of which was standing open; and in the front parlour they found two respectable-looking elderly gentlemen, both of whom saluted Georgiana with the profoundest respect. One of them was the Duke of Devonshire's agent, and the other his solicitor; and in this capacity were they forthwith introduced to Pauline.

But before there was leisure to exchange a word upon matters of business, a wagon, laden with furniture, stopped in front of the house; and Pauline, now fully comprehending all the generous zeal which Georgiana had exercised in her behalf, threw herself upon that noble lady's bosom and wept plenteously. The agent and the attorney were much moved by this pathetic scene, and when that first ebullition of feeling was expended, Pauline was enabled to bestow her attention to the men of business.

In a few words the agent informed her that, immediately upon receiving the duke's instructions, at nine o'clock that

morning, he had ascertained who was the proprietor of the house in question; and, being fortunate enough to find that individual at home, the projected transaction was speedily arranged between them. In fine, the house had been purchased in the name of Miss Pauline Clarendon; and the duke's attorney had been called in to assist in the drawing up of a provisional deed, making over the property to the young lady, until the more formal and elaborate conveyance could be effected. In the meantime the duke's upholsterer had received certain instructions, the result of which was the arrival of the wagon laden with furniture, and attended by several men to put down the carpets and fit up the entire premises as promptly as many hands could work and money could inspire them with the requisite activity.

Vain were it to attempt to describe the mingled joy and gratitude of Pauline on receiving all these munificent proofs of the friendship entertained for her by the Duchess of Devonshire. Suffice it to say that if her words fell short in expressing her feelings, her looks made up for the deficiency. And the noble lady, the authoress of this generous work, what were her emotions? Oh, never until then had she experienced so full and profound an appreciation of the value of riches as a means to do good; and many a frailty, many an error, many a fault, ay, and much want of virtuous principle in the general routine of her existence, were atoned for by the fostering succour thus afforded to an otherwise friendless, persecuted, and unhappy maiden.

On returning to Devonshire House, Pauline partook of luncheon with her kind-hearted friend; and, the duke's travelling-carriage having been ordered in the meantime, the young lady took an affectionate leave of the duchess and set out for the villa near Aylesbury. There her preparations for departure were soon made; and Octavia, whose aberration of intellect had within the last few days assumed the form of a harmless childishness, was delighted when she comprehended that she was to take a ride in the travelling-carriage. The nurse who had all along attended upon the unfortunate victim of royal lust accompanied the sisters to their new home, or rather, on this return to their former one; and it was about eleven o'clock at night when the party reached Paradise Villas in the Edgeware Road.

Pauline had entertained some apprehensions relative to

the effect which this removal to a familiar scene might produce upon her sister; and during the journey thither from the vicinage of Aylesbury she had more than once regretted her resolution to take up her future abode in that house where Octavia had first met the prince. But those alarms proved unfounded, and, indeed, rather experienced an opposite result; for on entering her former home, Octavia appeared to recognize it, changed though it were by the handsome furniture which now constituted its comfort and its tasteful elegance, and the unfortunate young lady, throwing herself upon Pauline's bosom, burst into a flood of tears.

From that day forth a gradual improvement was visible in the mental condition of Octavia Clarendon.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE LAWYER AND HIS MYSTERIOUS VISITRESS

THE reader will observe it was on the day following the masquerade at Covent Garden Theatre that the adventures of Mr. Sneaksby and Ichabod Paxwax occurred, on the one hand, and that the incidents chronicled in the preceding chapter took place on the other. It was likewise on this same day, and at about the hour of noon, that a young female, neatly apparelled and enveloped in a cloak, alighted from a hackney-coach at the entrance to Featherstone Buildings, Holborn.

Passing into that place, she examined the brass plates on the doors and the inscriptions on the doorposts, until her eyes encountered the name of Mr. Rigden painted on one of the latter; and forthwith entering the clerk's office, she inquired if she could see the attorney himself. The reply was in the affirmative, and her name was requested. This, however, she refused to give, observing that Mr. Rigden did not know her, but that her business was of considerable importance. Finally, after one of the clerks had communicated with his master, the young woman was introduced to that gentleman's private office.

"Be seated," said Mr. Rigden, taking a rapid but searching survey of the visitress, as if he sought to penetrate into the nature of her business even before she had begun to explain it; and he saw before him a very pretty female, almost a girl, of short stature, and whose countenance wore an air of deep decision and firmness of purpose.

In obedience to his invitation, she took a chair; then, fixing her eyes for a few moments upon Mr. Rigden's features, she scrutinized them in her turn, as if to assure herself that he was a man to whom she might confide some purpose

which she had in view. Rapid and even furtive as that survey was, Mr. Rigden did not fail to notice it; and the profoundly experienced man of business full well comprehended its meaning and purport. Imagining, therefore, that the mystery attendant upon the visitress and the very nature of that scrutinizing look which she had fixed upon him augured the development of an affair of more than usual importance, he said a few words to encourage her to open the requisite explanations.

"May I consider, sir," said the young woman, "that if nothing should come of the discourse which we may presently have together, the subject of that conversation shall remain a profound secret?"

"Unless you divulge to me any crime the punishment of which is demanded by the laws of society," responded the wary solicitor, "I shall, as a matter of course, look upon the object of your visit as strictly confidential."

The young woman did not appear quite satisfied with this answer; and she reflected profoundly for upwards of a minute, during which Mr. Rigden took snuff with an air of calm indifference.

"If you feel interested, sir, in the claims or pretensions of a particular client," the girl at length said, "would you not be grateful to any one who could assist you in the furtherance of that client's interest?"

"Most assuredly," answered the lawyer. Then, in a measured and significant tone, he added, "I should likewise know how to reward the individual rendering such succour."

"But if this succour were of somewhat an equivocal character?" said the young woman, inquiringly.

"There are many things which in the ordinary affairs of life deserve the name of subterfuges, equivocations, unjust dealings, and the taking of improper advantages, but which come within the legitimate course of procedure in legal matters."

And having given this reply, which, though guarded and cautious, was still encouraging, the attorney took another pinch of snuff.

"The production or the suppression of a document in a lawsuit is frequently attended with the most important results, I believe?" said the young woman, evidently acquir-

ing confidence, and yet feeling her way with the utmost care.

"As a matter of course," exclaimed Mr. Rigden; "and it is the province of the lawyer to avail himself of all those advantages which circumstances may throw in his way. Nor must he be overnice in looking into the source whence those advantages emanate."

Again the girl reflected deeply for a few moments, and again did Mr. Rigden regale his nostrils with snuff.

"Suppose, sir," resumed the strange visitress, "that you were interested for a client whose cause depended upon the production of certain papers on the part of his opponent, and suppose some one had the power of rendering it impossible for that opponent to produce these necessary papers? Would you countenance this some one in such a line of conduct?"

"I have yet to learn," said Mr. Rigden, "that it is a crime, or a dishonour, or even an impropriety for an attorney to buy off a hostile witness or keep him out of the way, if possible. On the contrary, this is done every day, and enters into the widely ramified proceedings of legitimate law-chicanery. And again, if certain papers, constituting in themselves important testimony, are to be purchased either for production or suppression, I do not think that the king's attorney-general would hesitate to enter into such a transaction; and what the attorney-general would do, a humble individual such as Mr. Rigden need not blush to accomplish."

"In plain terms, then," said the girl, now fixing her eyes with a keen significance upon the lawyer, "you are prepared to enter into a transaction which is quite safe and secure and will no doubt put a large sum of money into your pocket?"

"And into yours also, eh?" observed Mr. Rigden, suffering his cold and almost stern features to relax for a moment into a smile.

"No, sir, not a farthing," exclaimed the young woman, with impassioned vehemence.

"How nothing?" demanded the attorney, in astonishment.

"Because my motives are not mercenary, sir," was the immediate response. "And on that point I beg to decline any explanation whatsoever."

"Then if your motives be not mercenary, there is assuredly greater confidence to be placed in you," said the lawyer, with a view of encouraging his visitress to proceed. "Come, we are alone, in a place where no eavesdropper can overhear what passes between us, and you have already felt your way with sufficient precaution. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," was the reply; "and I will no longer hesitate to explain the object of my presence here. You have a client, Mr. Rigden, who believes that he has certain claims upon the title and estates now in the enjoyment of Lord Florimel?"

"Exactly so," said the attorney. "But how came you with this information?"

"That is my business," observed the young woman, laconically. "It is true, then, that you have such a client; and you are doubtless anxious to put him in possession of all that he claims?"

"Such is the aim of every attorney who enjoys the confidence of his client," returned Mr. Rigden, taking snuff consequentially.

"And an affair of such importance would not only prove most lucrative, but also of great advantage to your professional reputation?" continued the girl.

"I shall not affect any fastidiousness by denying those propositions," said the lawyer, marvelling at the acuteness of so young a creature in probing, as it were, the very thoughts which he was revolving in his mind at the moment.

"But in order to ensure the success of your client," she proceeded, "it is necessary that Lord Florimel should be unable to produce certain documents."

"Such is the fact," replied Mr. Rigden, now becoming more deeply interested than ever in the present discourse.

"And if any one were to place those deeds in your hands," said the girl, in a low, measured, and solemn tone, "would you send them back to Lord Florimel with a letter informing him how you became possessed of them? In a word, what would you do with them?"

Mr. Rigden took snuff and gazed intently upon the young woman, in order to read in her countenance all that was passing in her mind. Then, satisfied with the result of a scrutiny from which she did not wince, he said, in a voice as low, measured, and solemn as her own had just been,

"If I had those documents in my possession, I should keep them."

"And would you know, at a glance, if they were placed before you, whether they were the right ones or not?" demanded the girl, her eyes flaming up with the lustre of joy and triumph as that response which the lawyer gave fell upon her ears.

"Yes, at a glance," he immediately rejoined.

"Then are these the documents your client requires?" she exclaimed, rising from her seat and producing from beneath her cloak a bundle of parchments and other deeds tied around with red tape.

Mr. Rigden, forgetting his usual cold tranquillity of manner, greedily extended his hands to grasp the papers; but the young woman made an imperious motion for him to desist. She then opened the parcel and allowed him to peruse the first lines of the principal document, observing, at the same time, "If they be not the deeds which you require, I shall not leave them with you."

"But they are, they are!" exclaimed Mr. Rigden, becoming perfectly excited with joy; for the prospects of a lucrative suit and the fame of conducting such a cause to a successful issue, together with other considerations, instantaneously sprang up in his imagination.

"And you will make use of those papers to forward the views of your client and ruin Lord Florimel?" said the girl, her countenance becoming ghastly pale and almost hideous with the workings of evil passions in her bosom, so that the keen-sighted attorney had now no difficulty in fathoming the motive which was instigating her in the present proceeding.

"What guarantee can you give me that the present transaction will remain enveloped in eternal secrecy?" asked the lawyer. "Remember, you are a stranger to me, you have not even told me who you are nor whence you come, and you may have taken this step in a moment of spite —"

"Oh, I can give you the best guarantee which it is in mortal power to afford," exclaimed the young girl, her stature appearing to become more elevated as she drew herself up in the sublimity of her wrath and her triumph, while her countenance grew animated with a supernal lustre, as if it caught the reflection of those flames which were

burning in the hell of her heart. "And that guarantee," she continued, in the exalted tone of a pythoness dealing forth terrible oracles, "is the eternal, the undying, the unquenchable vengeance of an outraged woman. There, sir, now you have learned my secret, now you are acquainted with my motive, and now also you read the whole history of my shame. It was not my intention to have revealed to you all this; but you demanded a guarantee, and I give you one. For, as truly as there is a God above us and a Satan in the realms beneath us, so surely will my vengeance endure until the lips which are giving utterance to these words shall be silenced by the cold hand of death, and until the heart which cherishes the fervid hope of crushing a wretch down unto the very dust shall cease to beat in the silent tomb. Think you, then, that I will betray you? Think you that I shall prove a traitress to myself?"

"No, I do not entertain such a thought, now that you have spoken thus candidly," said Mr. Rigden. "I accept the guarantee, and I promise to make a good use of the documents," he added, in a significant tone. "But will you not accept any reward?"

"Not a farthing," exclaimed the girl, proudly. "Do you not know a woman's mind better than to make her such a proposal, after all I have just said to you? But it is useless to waste more time upon that point; for few are the beings of your sex who do appreciate the extent of virtue, love, and self-sacrifice of which a woman is capable, nor, on the other hand, comprehend the nature of the vengeance which she craves when outraged. Farewell, sir."

With these words, the strange visitress took her departure, leaving Mr. Rigden as much amazed at her extraordinary character and proceedings as he was rejoiced at the object and result of the interview.